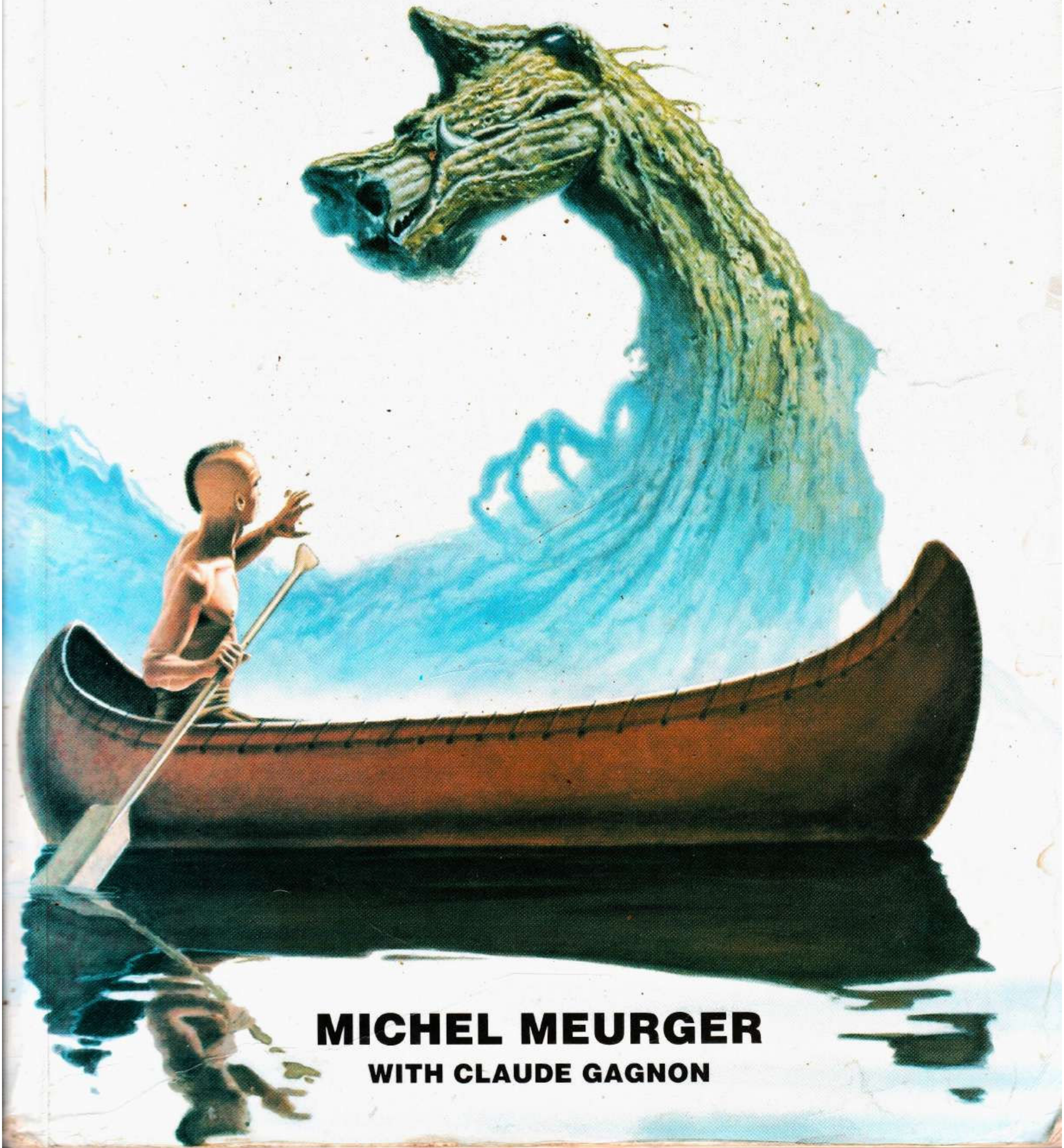
LAKE MONSTER TRADITIONS

A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS



MICHEL MEURGER

WITH CLAUDE GAGNON

LAKE MONSTER TRADITIONS
A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS

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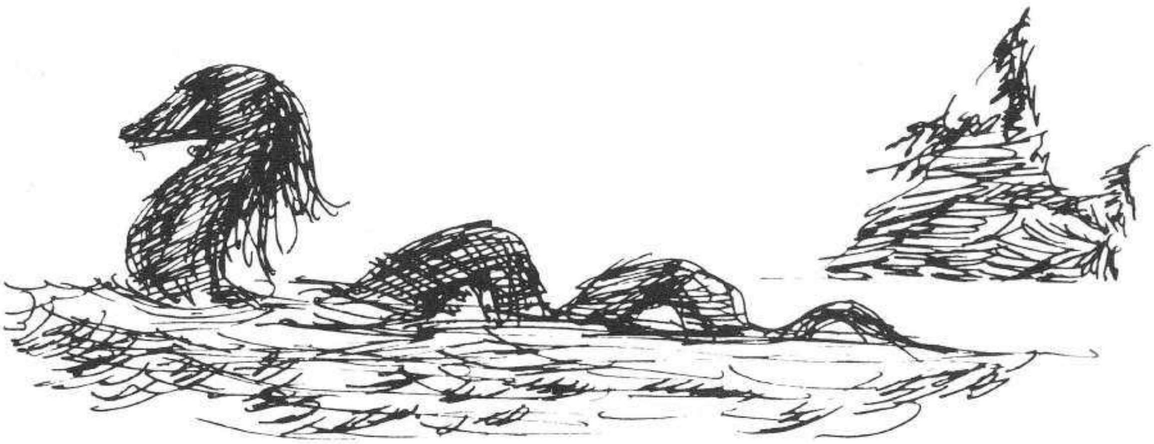

MICHEL MEURGER
CLAUDE GAGNON

FORTEAN TOMES
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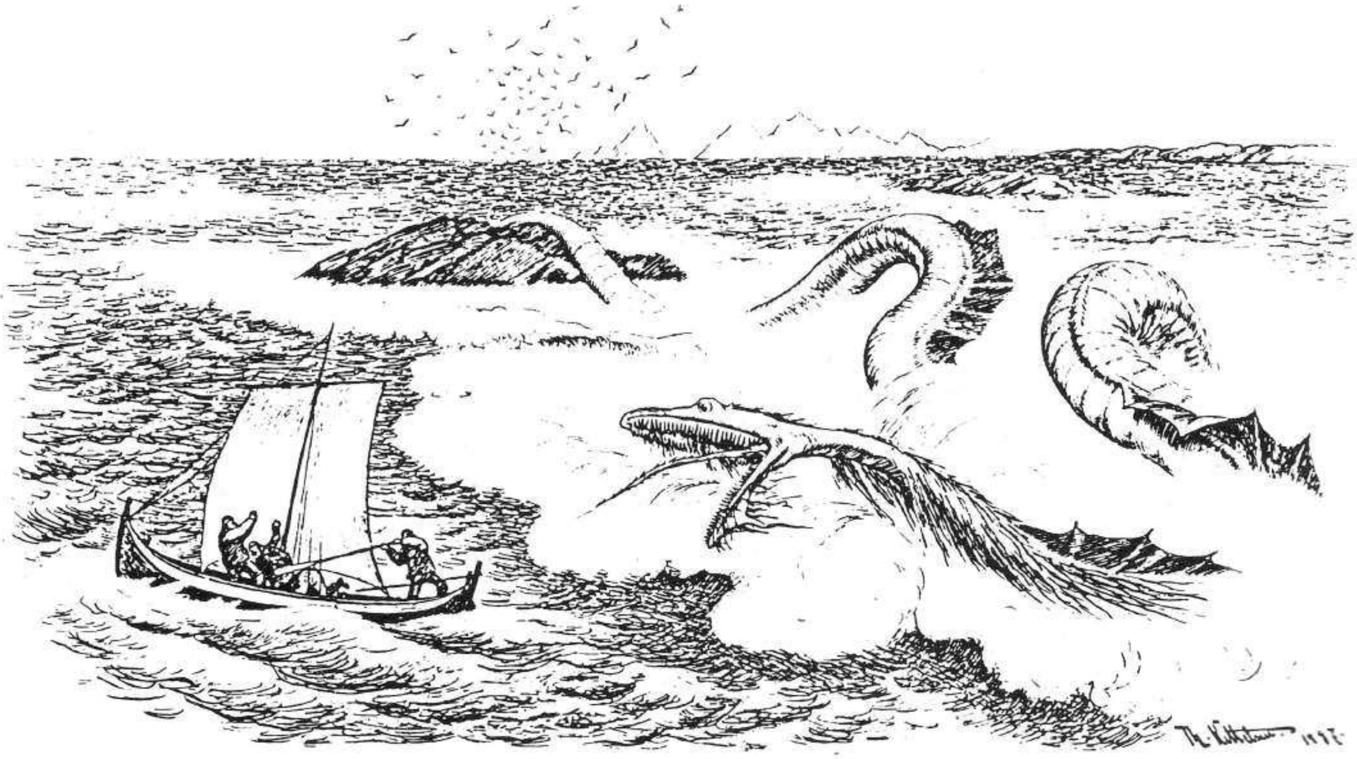


"This business [of Loch Ness] serves as
a kind of mirror reflecting human behaviour."

Tim Dinsdale
(cited by N. Witchell, in *The Loch Ness Monster.*)

"Nature, in the final analysis,
is one of the myths forged by western society
in the image of paradise:
a structured unity –
conceptual, with makeshift mechanics –
conceived to evict man from an imagined world,
a pure creation of the humanist mind."

Alain Robbe-Grillet

PREFACE

The field-study of Québecian lakes was conducted jointly by the authors during six months in 1981. Claude Gagnon has written-up the inquiries on Lakes Maskinongé, Rémi, Simon and Placid (from p49-55). In these passages the expressed opinions do not necessarily correspond with my own. I drafted the remaining reports for Chapter 1, and am responsible for all the interpretive outlines apart from those ventured by the witnesses. Likewise, I wrote all the other chapters, with the exception of the old Chapter 5, which was largely the text of a lecture by Claude Gagnon, delivered to a conference at the University of Québec at Trois-Rivières, and which, due to technical reasons, had to be dropped from this new edition. The illustrations for the original edition were chosen jointly.

An early version of the work appeared in the Québec journal *La Jamigoine* (Spring 1982), an issue devoted to folklore trends in Québec.

All revisions, and additions of new material and illustrations for this FORTEAN TOMES edition were made or selected by myself.

If the scientism of the cryptozoologists and the sceptics is my main target in *Lake monster traditions*, I shall add that I refute, with the same ardour, any occult interpretation. I don't believe that monster sightings are shamanic experiences. My book suggests exactly the contrary, namely that in the case of lake monsters, the moment of the experience is less important than the later re-working of the sighting, and the social pressure upon it, to fit cultural patterning.

In the same way, my term 'mythical landscape' refers only to a culturally patterned cluster of motifs, not to some ecstatic revelation. Lake monster stories are primarily stories; ie. discourses trying to find materiality through the misinterpretation of floating logs, bizarre waves, etc., and helped in the attempt by anomalic zoology and true occultism. But the top hat of scientism and the feather hat of neo-shamanism are both full of moths.

The Revival of traditional monsters like the dragon and the wildman is but one aspect of a broader phenomenon: the emergence of a modern form of primitivism in modern culture. Neo-shamanism and African dinosaur-hunts are various and complimentary aspects of this regression towards Nature. I am currently preparing an essay on the relationship of such topics to mainstream culture.

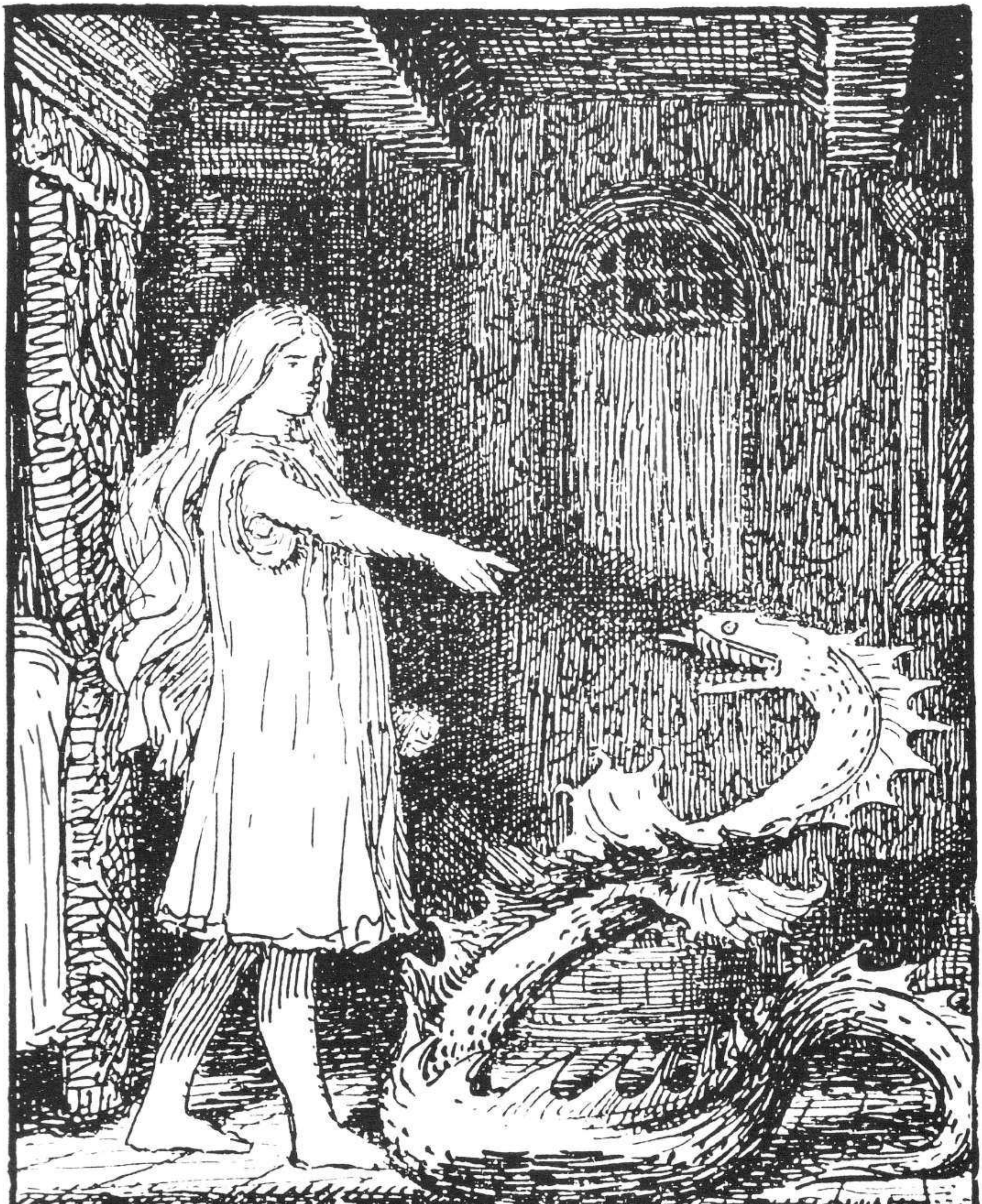
MM

INTRODUCTION

ON THE LINDORM'S TRAIL: THE NATURALIZATION OF CULTURE

"There are marten cats and badgers
and foxes in the Enchanted Woods,
but there are, it seems, mightier creatures,
and the lake may hide what
neither net nor line can take."

W.B. Yeats: *The Celtic Twilight.*



'Virgin and Lindorm', a drawing by Niels Skovgaad for Axel Olrik's *Danish legends* (1928) [Fortean Picture Library]

THE ORIGINS OF FACTICITY

To deal with the riddle of the lake monster is not an easy task. The available literature [1], as extensive as it is, suffers from many a bias, as this introduction will demonstrate. The quest for Nessie at Loch Ness illustrates just one part of the difficulties. Here, for half a century, the monster's hunters have stubbornly pursued the elusive creature without success. Loch Ness has proved itself to be a bottomless pit, swallowing numerous talents and mountains of money. This is pretty close to what François Rabelais defined, a long time ago, in the expression "science without a conscience"; a meaningless pragmatism that from the start neglects the preliminaries of the enterprise, which is to thoroughly investigate the nature of the field. As Grimshaw and Lester point out, the propensity of scientists to adopt "an unreflective worship of identifiable 'facts'" is a source of major methodological error because their "unproblematic respect for 'facts'" leads them "to avoid inquiry into the origins of facticity." [2]

This is, indeed, the core of the problem. Believers and unbelievers alike zoom in on the monster, assuming from the start a specificity that does not exist. To them Nature is the solution. Cryptozoologists believe in a hidden Nature; sceptics reduce the question to a misinterpreted Nature; and occultists conjure up a transcendental Nature. As a result, all three unite in a common respect for phenomenology. Regardless of whether the object is a floating log, an undiscovered animal or even a materialized phantom, the crucial point is that there is something out there to be tracked or identified. This human experience with a fragment of Nature is illustrated by the reports of monster sightings: some attempt to reinforce the anomalous aspects and others their illusory character.

One example of opposing views contrasts the opinions of sceptic Steuart Campbell and the 'father of cryptozoology' Bernard Heuvelmans. Campbell refutes sightings by trying to enhance unfavourable environmental conditions – eg. the darkness of night or the blurring of distance, and other tricks of Nature. Cryptozoologists, on the other hand, use the old gimmick of portraying the sighter as a kind of 'noble savage'.

This reverence for Nature has a corollary: a deep contempt for irrational world views and the specificity of folk-tradition. Reviewing old tales of water-horses at Loch Ness, sceptic Campbell speaks of "superstition". [3] Under the opposing flag, in asking "What is cryptozoology?", Heuvelmans states that "the task of cryptozoology consists of *demythifying the content of information* in an attempt to help make the inventory of the planet's fauna as complete as possible." [4] For Heuvelmans, myth is synonymous with mystification, as proved by his felicitation to a Norwegian naturalist of the Age of Reason, Erik Pontoppidan, for his "honest attempt at *demystifying* the sea-serpent". [5] Along the same lines Campbell accuses Abbot Adamnan, the first author to have mentioned a monster in the River Ness, of the pious fraud of inventing the episode "to persuade pagans that they must convert to his religion." [6]

Such statements demonstrate the *instrumental* value of

---

1 ■ See George Eberhart's comprehensive bibliography of "unaccounted for creatures": G.M. Eberhart 1983, p33–80.

See also: J.J. Barloy 1985, ch 7.

Nessie has spawned her own vast literature; see: Henry H. Bauer, 'The Loch Ness Monster: a guide to the literature,' in *Zetetic Scholar*, N° 7 (1980), p30–42. This was later expanded in a full book on the subject: H.H. Bauer 1986.

2 ■ R. Grimshaw and P. Lester 1976, p29.

3 ■ S. Campbell 1986, p15.

4 ■ Bernard Heuvelmans, 'What is cryptozoology?', in *Cryptozoology*, vol 1 (Winter 1982), p1.

5 ■ B. Heuvelmans 1975, p75; and 1968, p111.

[Publisher's note: Meurger has translated from Heuvelmans' original work in French – but because this may not be accessible to non-French readers we also give, where possible, the approximate reference for the widely-known English translation of 1968, which abridged and amalgamated separate works on 'krakens' and sea-serpents (approximate, because the two texts do not correspond exactly.)]

6 ■ S. Campbell 1986, p25.

discussions of monsters for Heuvelmans and Campbell. The subject is treated by them as an excuse for a sharp ideological polemic; two militant rationalists taking their positions in *the old fight of Enlightenment against the Marvellous*. On this level they are allies, because to establish whether Nessie is a hidden animal or a misperceived otter plays the same role, namely to *triumph over legend*.

Enlightened scientists used similar arguments, claiming poltergeists were merely noisy rats and 'White Ladies' phosphorescent wood. In fact those interpretations were reflecting the bourgeois values of the Age of Reason; poetry had to be replaced by prosaism and mystical extasis by common sense. A deep distrust for a mystical approach to the world underlies the conscious prosaism of the bourgeois interpretation of myth: the White Lady was "just" putrefied wood. Today, the equivalent would be to say that Nessie was "only" some unknown animal. The rationalistic process of objectivizing is at the same time patronizing. Their excessively polemic approach to myth blinds both cryptozoologists and sceptics alike to its true importance.

A medallion portrait of Olaus Magnus (1490–1557); from Frick and Jonason, *Carta marina* (1970).

Whether searching for hidden creatures or for pieces of wood, cryptozoologists and sceptics consciously refuse to accept myth as a product of the human mind, as an imaginary story. They accept Man as a witness of Nature, but not as a creator of a mythified naturalism. For them myths and legends are always the echo of an objective experience; they are like archæologists excavating the soft soil of fables looking for a hard reality. This often leads to a number of consequences: firstly, the legend, as a container of facts, gains scientific status as a document. Secondly, the present scientific-rationalistic approach is moralized and projected into the past, to judge mentalities according to their degree of likeness to the modern mind. We have seen how Campbell plays Sherlock Holmes in order to unmask sinister clerical machinations. Heuvelmans, in turn, praises Bishop Pontoppidan for his rationalism and invites his reader to smile at the "näiveté of His Eminence" [7], the Swedish Bishop Olaus Magnus, who, in the 16th century, perpetrated the unforgivable crime of believing that the appearances of lake monsters portended grave political events. Pointing out the shortcomings of other writers, Heuvelmans himself is not free of some degree of inconsistency, believing he has the right to consider the modern definition of common sense as a legitimate method to deal with such distant mentalities.

In fact, Heuvelmans is a prisoner of mistaken logic: starting from his present zoological knowledge to detect objective features in historical descriptions of monsters, he can also consider his own concept of reason as a legitimate time-machine. Here, the careful differentiating process of the historian is replaced by a method of annexation. This is not new: the pioneering French psychologist Jean Martin Charcot (1825-1893) had evolved a fairly similar approach in translating the religious imagery of the past into contemporary medical terms; the *"diagnostic rétrospectif"* (retrospective diagnosis). Charcot interpreted stylistic conventions as clinical data and changed subjective mysticism into objective science. [**8**]

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[7] ■ B. Heuvelmans 1975, p53; 1968, p93.

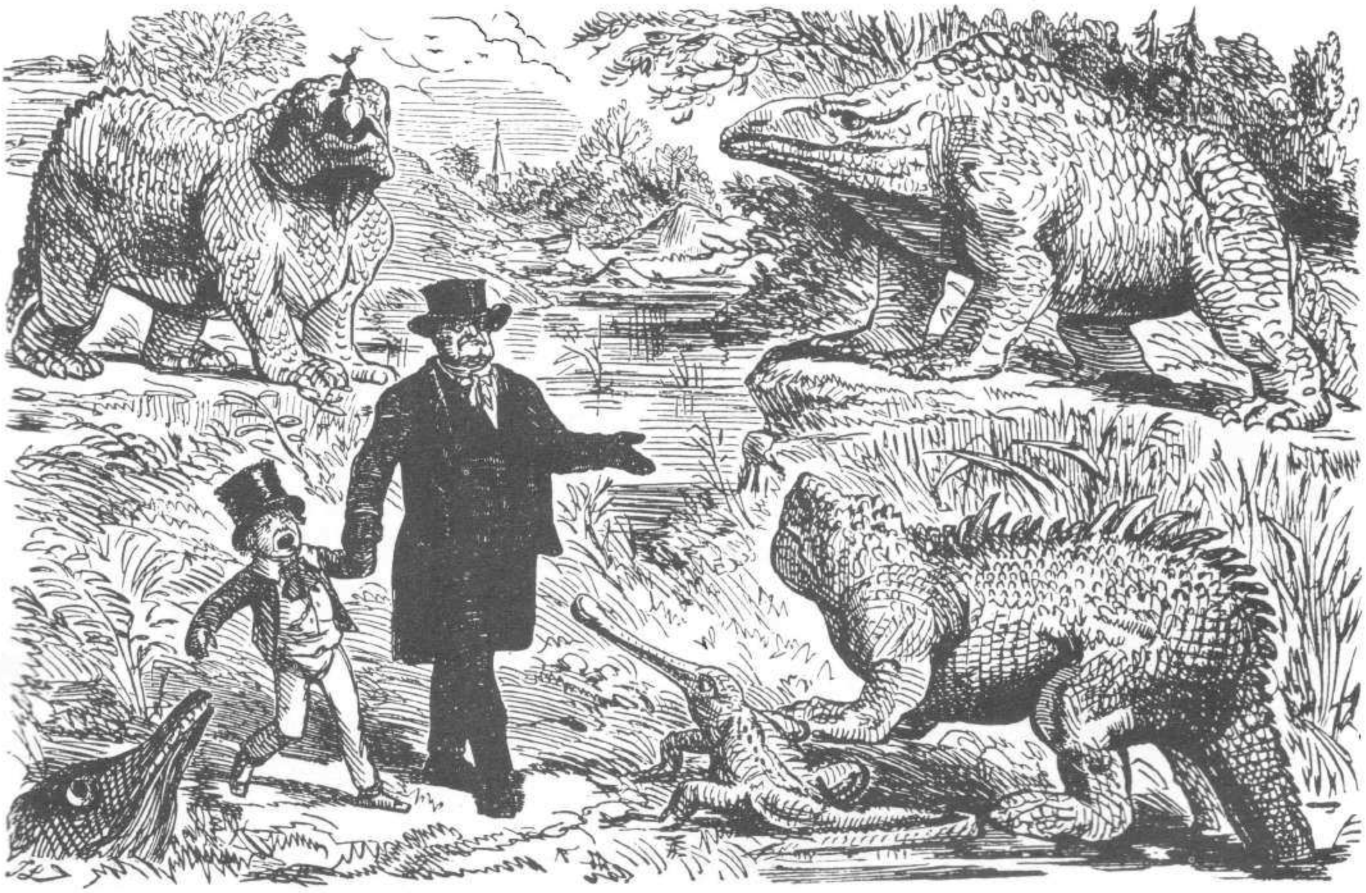
One has to wonder whether modern cryptozoologists are not doing the same. Just as Charcot, using his medical background, mutated a saint into a hysteric, might not the cryptozoologists be converting fabulous beings into conjectural creatures? The fight for Reason and Nature will be turned into a compromise with fiction. Cryptozoological treatises are jungles of plausibility for hundreds of would-be animals. This ambiguous corpus helps popular 'Lost World' hopes to gain an element of respectability. No zoo can offer us the Disneyesque show of a family of *Nessiteras rhombopteryx* frolicking with pink balloons. Yet the Jack-in-the-box demonstration by Professor Challenger has become the best support for secularized myths.

THE SCIENTIFICATION OF FOLKLORE

Viewed as a historical phenomenon, the cryptozoological admissibility of myth will complete the circle. Grimshaw and Lester have studied the 19th century "scientification of folklore, founded upon the findings of the very natural sciences that had arisen to supplant it", as "the only way monsters could survive at all". [**9**] Suddenly, not only were monsters more real, but, with the discoveries of paleontology, purely legendary situations also became plausible. Thus the ride on the dragon's back in our illustration from 1611 [on next page] moved from the realm of pure fantasy into a conjectural borderland incorporating the discovery of the *pterodactyl*.

This scientification of folklore is, however, only one of a

Science – the pedagogical 'Man-in-black' – showing to the new generation 'science's' dragons as rationalized chimeras. 'Visit to the Antediluvian Reptiles at Sydenham: Master Tom strongly objects to having his mind improved.' A drawing by John Leech, *Punch Annual* **1855.** [Fortean Picture Library]



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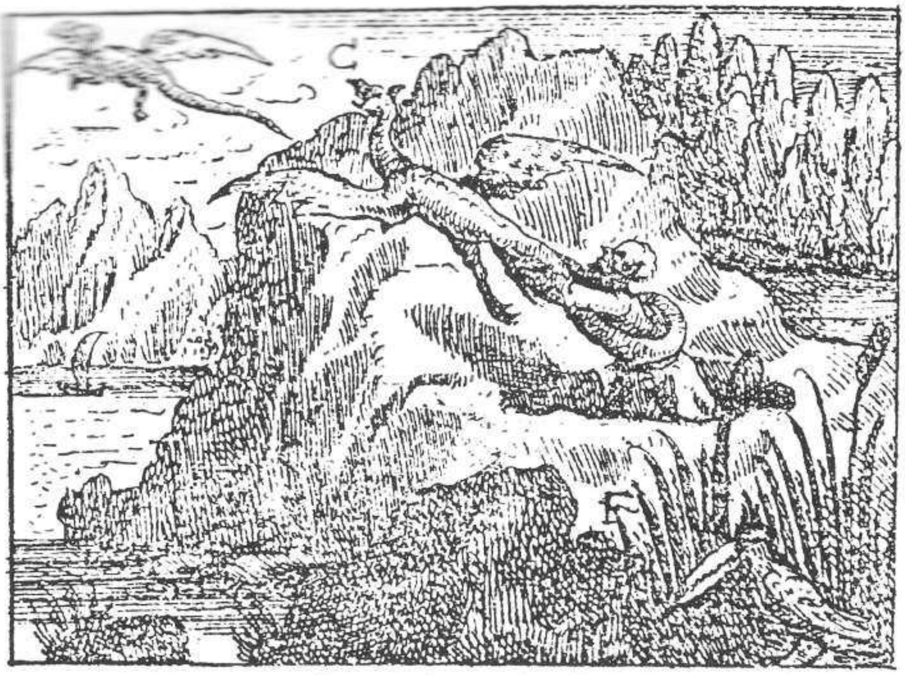
8 ■ See Jan Goldstein, 'The hysteria diagnosis and the politics of anti-clericalism in late nineteenth century France,' in *Journal of modern history*, N° 54 (June 1982), p209–239.

9 ■ R. Grimshaw and P. Lester 1976, p10.



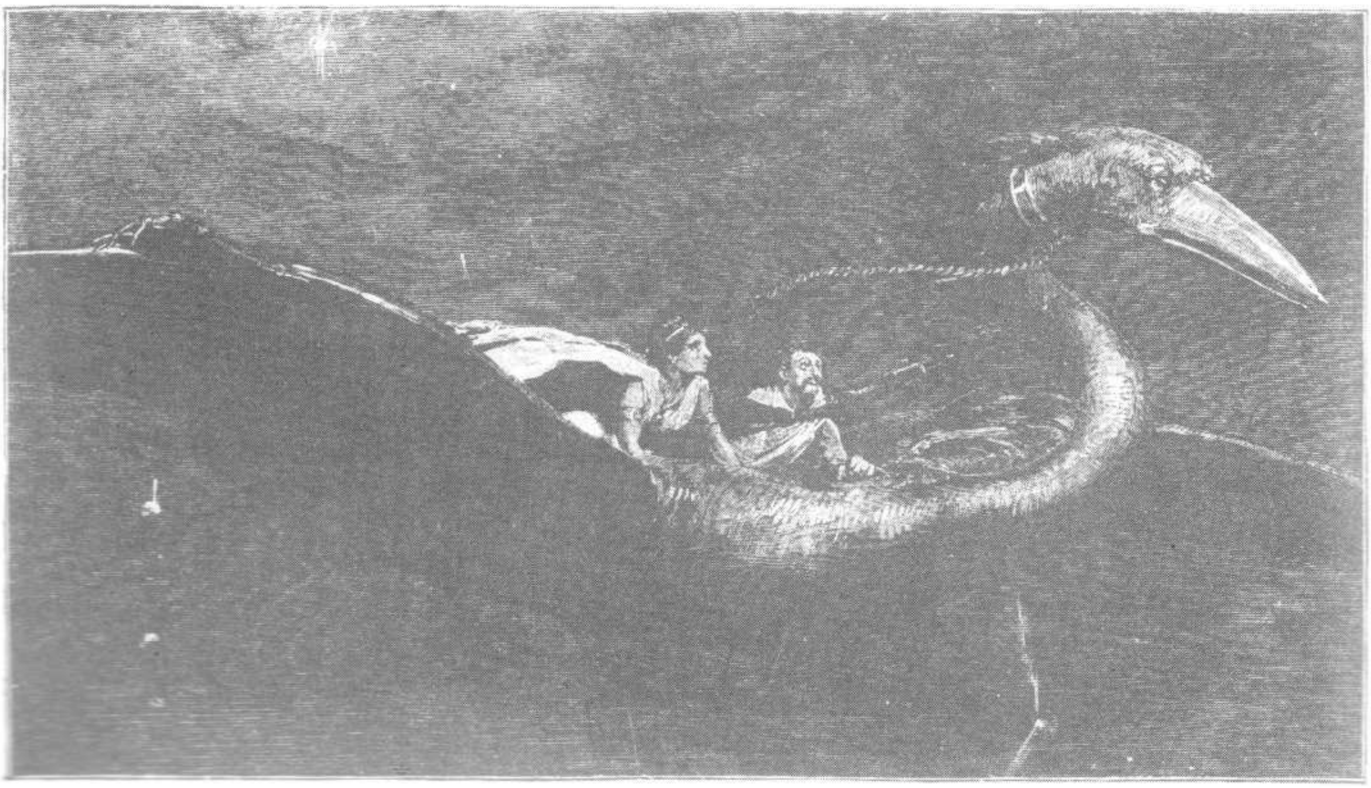
The scientification of folklore: the ride on the dragon's back – from Swiss legend to paleontological conjecture:

Left: **An engraving from Leopold Cysat's** *Beschreibung des berühmter Lucerner oder Vier–Waldstätter See* **(1611).** [Fortean Picture Library]

Below: **A drawing by Gilbert Gaul for James de Mille's** *A strange manuscript found in a copper cylinder* **(1888).** [Fortean Picture Library]

number of different rationalizing processes which began with the birth of the modern mind in the time of the Renaissance. The lake monster riddle forms only a facet of the more general problem of dragons [**10**]; that is to say, a creature asserted both by the Holy Scripture and the erudite writers of antiquity. The revival of classical literature and invention of printing made available the texts of the old geographers in which dragons were treated as living animals. Renaissance naturalists were trying to make reality correspond to Pliny. [**11**] They searched indigenous folk-legends for a confirmation of learned reading.

With that in mind, one can try to find countries during the Renaissance which had a *progressive elite*, ready to rationalize subjective beliefs, and a *very strong folk culture*, replete with nature demons, including water-dragons. Accordingly, we have



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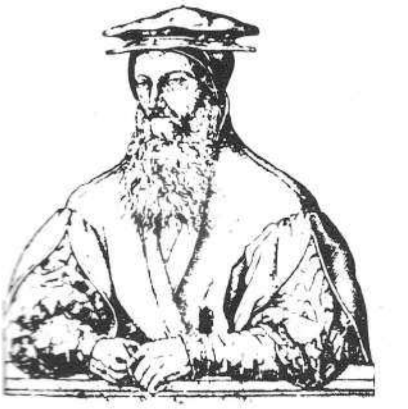
10 ■ See Lutz Mackensen, 'Drache,' in H. Bächtold Staubli, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* , vol 2, 1929, p364–404.

11 ■ See F.M. Gagnon and D. Petel 1986.



Conrad Gesner (1516–1565). [Fortean Picture Library]

to expect a copious scholarly literature, naturalizing elemental demons and modifying supernatural encounters with them into profane sightings of undiscovered animals. Such countries exist: Switzerland and Scandinavia (Sweden and Norway).

This allows us to answer in cultural terms a rhetorical question by Heuvelmans: "How to explain that, after Antiquity, the sea-serpent would manifest itself *almost only in Scandinavia* or in Scandinavia's possessions until 1750?" **[12]** We answer by asking another question: how can it be explained that from the Renaissance to the 19th century Switzerland had produced the largest number of writers dealing with the problem of dragons? Some of these writers were: in the 16th century, Renward Cysat (1545-1614); in the 17th century, Johann-Jakob Wagner (1641-1695); in the following century Johann-Jakob Scheuchzer (1672-1733); then the naturalist S. Studer (1757-1834) who advertized for the skin of the giant *'stollenwurm'*. **[13]**

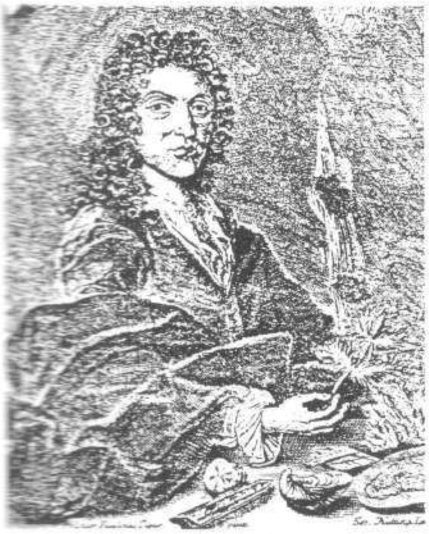
The obvious cryptozoological answer would be: because the legends of dragons had some foundation in fact. This we cannot accept. Cysat, Wagner and Scheuchzer describe a whole dragonesque *'Systema Naturæ'* [see Appendix 1] ranging from winged dragons who lit up trees and snakes as thick as "big cartwheels" to lake and river monsters. Cysat adds dwarfs, ghostly riders and fire-spooks. All of these are "well attested" by witnesses.

In response to Heuvelmans' question, one can say that the sea-serpent was at first a typical product of Scandinavia, in the same way that the dragon became a Swiss monopoly. *The process arose from a local elite taking a deep interest in folk-belief.* Switzerland was at the same time the conservatory for archaically masked confraternities, and found in utopic Geneva the cradle of the modern mind. The greatest Renaissance naturalist, Conrad Gesner (1516-1565), was Swiss. While he searched for dragon exhibits, his learned countrymen were investigating witch-marks. Zoology and 'chirurgy' served the myth.

The new laical concept of man's place in society helped old fables to gain a new facticity. Renward Cysat, himself a *clerk*, is the qualified representative of this world-view. Personal *visions* of the little people, ecstatic belief in abductions by the Furious Host and alleged dragon sightings are interpreted by him as *evidence*. He estimates the value of them, not on the level of credibility, but on the judicial level as a *record*; as a clerk, he judges that the more representative a person is of a group, the more recordable the account. The new concept of facticity has to do with personal status, and the agreement of the individual report with *collective belief*. Thus Cysat's texts are not 'proofs' of zoological realities, but simply of the integration of folk-beliefs into the new bourgeois and urban culture. **[14]**

The secularization of the supernatural made it possible for mountain-elves and water-nymphs to be called before the judge's bench, and, likewise, the feats of sea monsters and the flights of dragons to be recorded by goose-feather quills.

We can now re-examine Heuvelmans' statement. He quotes the testimony of Captain Lawrence von Ferry and two of his seamen, sworn before a court in Bergen in 1751, describing a



Johann–Jakob Scheuchzer (1672–1733). From an engraving by Melchior Füsslin, in Scheuchzer's *Itinera Alpina* **(1723).** [Fortean Picture Library] horse-headed sea-serpent they allegedly saw in 1746. Heuvelmans says: "One doubts whether, in the middle of the 18th century, any tribunal would have gathered with such pomp and laid itself open to ridicule just to establish an account of such a phantasmogorical meeting, if there had been the slightest suspicion of the sincerity of von Ferry and his men," **[15]** and he insists on the "solid commonsense" of the Scandinavians.

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[12] ■ B. Heuvelmans 1975, p74; 1968, p114.

[13] ■ Heinrich Dübi, 'Von Drachen und Stollenwürmern,' in *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde*, vol 38, 1939–1940, p158.
See also Appendix 1.

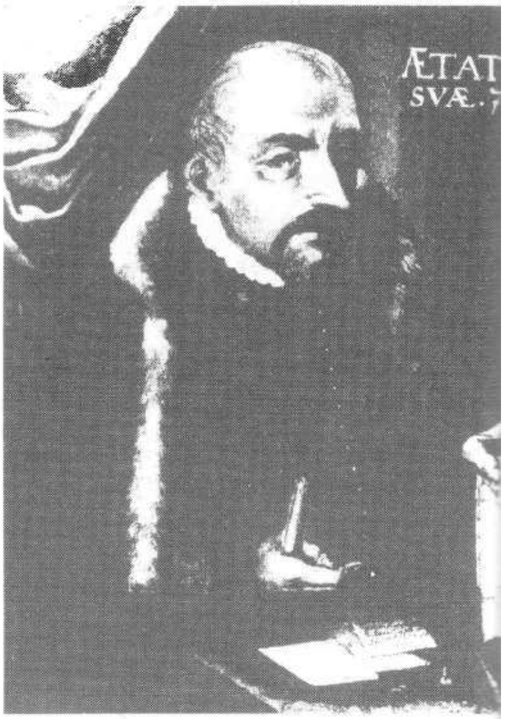
[14] ■ R. Cysat 1969, vol 1, part 2, p565ff.

Himself a rationalist, Heuvelmans hastily generalizes the position of the men of the Enlightenment. Yet in 1763, only a dozen years after von Ferry's deposition, a Scandinavian tribunal "risked ridicule" to prosecute and torture supposed witches. **[16]** Reasonable people were believing unreasonable things because they were all part of the *Zeitgeist*.

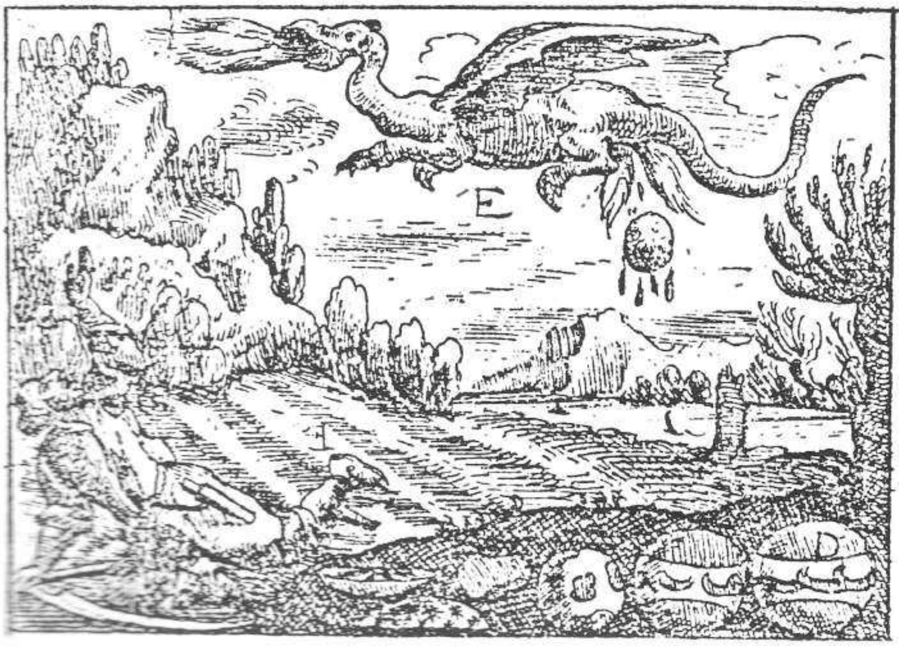
In the country of dragons, Switzerland, the belief in this monster was so established before the courts that it was once central to a property dispute in 1509. Will-Erich Peuckert discusses this interesting case, which involved the claims of two residents of Lucern, Cysat's hometown, to the same *'Drachenstein'* , a stone allegedly dropped by a flying dragon [see illustration below]. Peuckert reflects that: *"The mythic world vanishes into the bourgeois-judicial one."* **[17]**

Von Ferry's deposition is not an isolated one. The 'testimonial-judicial' method of dealing with the Enchanted World was widely prevalent in Scandinavia where the confrontation between the urban elite and the traditional peasant culture took very specific and complex forms, only a few elements of which I can deal with here. In Scandinavia the dominant classes showed an interest in folklore earlier than elsewhere in Europe, using it for their own purposes of nationalistic glorification. The selective use of folklore by Olaus Magnus is a classic example of this. **[18]**

In the 17th century regional field-studies of antiquities were made in the Kingdom of Sweden, and one can wonder whether or not these extensive official investigations had the effect of revitalizing some folk-beliefs, including lake-monster legends. In 1667 the government founded the *'Antiquitets Collegium'* and



Renward Cysat (1545–1614). From an oil painting in the Benedictine Monastery at Engelberg, Switzerland. [Fortean Picture Library]



The 'dragon–stone' of Lucerne, allegedly dropped by a flying dragon. An engraving from Leopold Cysat's *Beschreibung des berühmter Lucemer oder Vier–Waldstätter See* **(1611).** [Fortean Picture Library]

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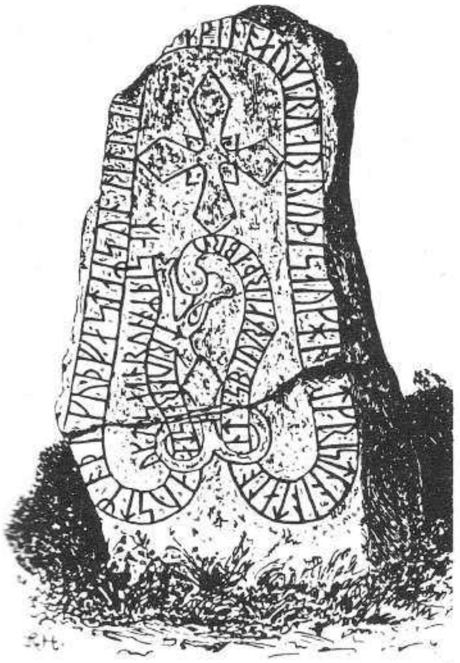
15 ■ B. Heuvelmans 1975, p65; 1968, p103.

16 ■ K. Baschwitz 1973, p241.

17 ■ W–E. Peuckert 1942, p32–33.

18 ■ O. Garstein 1963, vol 1, p16–21.



The runestone on Frösö island in Lake Storsjön, in Jamtland. According to aetiological legend, recorded in 1665, the stone keeps the monster bound into the depths (U. Oscarsson, 1964, p4). Little models of the Frösöstone are sold to tourists, as I verified during my stay at the lake in the summer of 1985. Engraving from H. Hildebrand, *Sveriges medeltid* **(1879), vol 1.** [Fortean Picture Library]

Around 1680, Gabriel Olai Hannodius, then minister of the little parish of Kökar, in Finland, wrote about a pair of runic stones, set one at the north, the other at the south shore of the nearby lake of Opp. According to a local tradition, a *"sjötroll"* **(lake troll) lived under its waters, and fishermen were afraid of it. The magic runes carved on the stones confined the monster to the depths, but if bad weather obscured them, the aquatic troll was set free, so the residents protected the runes with the bark of trees.**

a vast enquiry, lasting several years, dealt with various Nordic relics and traditional sagas. At the local level, ministers served as interviewers. The results of this research are conserved in five volumes at the Royal Library of Sweden. One volume (1685) mentions the "old legend" of the monster in Lake Storsjön, in Jämtland, where a *runic stone* protected the inhabitants against the monster's risings. [**19**]

Here, the testimonial-judicial approach is only a gathering of knowledge; the locals have simply to retell legends to the representative of the Crown. But there is also a repressive aspect, mainly in cases where the teller of the tale is, at the same time, its hero. Six years after the erudite inquest in Jämtland, a Swedish farm labourer at Markharäds was condemned to death by a court for "illicit intercourse with a wood or mountain spirit" (*"olovlig beblandelse med en Skogs eller Bergsrå"*). [**20**] This is, to my knowledge, the only case resulting in death in Europe; while similar experiences with *Skogsrå* have continued among the Swedes to this day, as I was told during a visit to Jämtland in 1985. Furthermore, in 17th century Norway, "it was *verified* by witnesses, and by court, that a girl had been lured into the mountain by the hidden people. In court she described how the interior of the mountain looked, and no one doubted the story." [**21**] In 1671, in Jämtland, Peter Rahm made a notarized statement about his meeting with a "little man", a troll, who abducted his wife to use her services as a midwife." [**22**]

It follows that the Scandinavian court secretaries had to record many strange things; not only the usual bed-and-broomstick stories about Nordic witches, but also the erotic adventures of humans with wood spirits and guided tours of the Underworld. According to these precedents von Ferry's testimonial act does not appear overly impressive. In a world where fairies and trolls had to answer to a court, sea monsters had to be legitimized as well. The horse-like features of the sea-serpent's head were common knowledge, as were amorous wood-nymphs and she-trolls in labour. The author of *The Chronicle of Hamar* (1540) and Olaus Magnus (1555) had already described this kind of maned monster. The snake-with-a-horse-like-head was, as we will see later, an old Scandinavian belief, and its representation adorned numerous folk-art objects. Therefore von Ferry's assertion is proof only of a traditional interpretation of a sighting he had *six* years prior to his official statement. This is too long a time to have a fresh recollection but more than enough time to blend memories with collective stereotypes.

In this manner the legal presentation of folklore is a trap for modern minds which are overly impressed by the aura of judicial sanctity; yet we can see this traditional rationality was a far cry from today's notions of reality. The partial reality of Scandinavian lawyers was just sufficient to validate their preconceptions; they used modern administrative codes to record Mother Goose stories. The mentalities of scientists also show this conciliating spirit. In 1752, barely a year after von Ferry's deposition, the Royal Scientific Academy of Sweden received the "thumb of a water-spirit", the *Sjöra* of Lake Helga in Småland. [**23**] In this, as in other matters, the Swedes were in competition with the

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19 ■ Cited in: Arvid Enqvist, 'Runstenen på Frösön och den bundna sjöormen,' in *Rig: tidskrift utgiven av föreningen för Svensk kulturhistoria*, Thulé, Stockholm, 1938, p157–168.

20 ■ G.O Hyltén-Cavallius 1864, vol 1, p281.

21 ■ T.Å. Bringsvaerd 1979, p21.

22 ■ J. Grimm 1883–1886, vol 2, p457.

23 ■ J. Lindow 1978, p127–129.

Danes. The famous doctor Thomas Bartholin (1616-1680) proudly showed his guests the pride of his Cabinet of Curiosities: the "hand of a merman" . [**24**]

In 1723, according to Benwell and Waugh, "Mermaids formed the subject of a Danish Royal Commission, set up to determine whether such creatures did, in fact, exist. If the Commission found that they were fabulous, then it was to be illegal to speak of mermaids. Happily, no change in the existing laws proved necessary. The Commission was prepared to acknowledge the existence of the mermaids for the very good reason that they themselves *saw a merman*, floating in the sea off the Faroe Islands." [**25**]

Folklore was scientificated and officialized. Sea monsters could be transformed into "strange and uncommon sea animals," as Bishop Erik Pontoppidan stated in his *Natural History of Norway* (1752-1753). With this definition the erudite Norwegian cleric could be considered as the father of cryptozoology. According to Heuvelmans, cryptozoology is "founded upon the *exception*" [**26**], and Roy Mackal feels that the animals that fall within this definition of cryptozoology have associated with them some "unusually *strange* or bizarre aspect". [**27**]

The progressive disbelief in fabulous creatures, combined with a greater awareness of their natural character, has rendered them as rare but graspable specimens. Pontoppidan explains the scarcity of reports about sea monsters as a corollary to their reluctance to emerge from the depths. In his book the infinite sea is used with the same rhetorical intent as by present-day cryptozoologists: in the sea everything is possible, though not necessarily catchable. Consequently the ocean remains the favourite Twilight Zone for speculative creatures. Pontoppidan collected his material about sirens with the assistance of local ministers, and it is of great interest because the statements he used in his book had been rationalized by his own clergymen. However, today's cryptozoologists turn into sceptics when faced with 18th century judgements about mermaids. Heuvelmans, for example, states about Pontoppidan's merfolk: "They are crude descriptions of sirenians and pinnipeds." [**28**]

In fact one can wonder if Heuvelmans is not sawing off the branch on which he is sitting; if, for him, "cryptozoological reconstructions depend on the simple accumulation of concurrent eyewitness testimony" [**29**], it is unclear why he refuses to accept Pontoppidan's cumulative material about humanoid sea creatures. As the Norwegian bishop states: "Here, in the diocese of Bergen, as well as in the manor of Nordland, there are *several hundreds* of persons of credit and reputation who affirm, with the strongest assurance, that they have seen this kind of creature." [**30**] Pontoppidan's witnesses are the same inhabitants of the western coast of Norway who sustain the existence of the great sea-serpent. Why should cryptozoologists accept the sea-serpent and reject the mermaid? If simple accumulation is proof, then the bulk of cumulative evidence concerning sirens is as large as that supporting the sea-serpents, and even *today* seamen continue to report sightings of these water-beings in European waters. [**31**]

Opposite: **In 1672, members of the crew of the Danish ship** *Oldenborg*, **bound for the East Indies, reported seeing a** *"Havman"* **(merman) off the Cape of Good Hope. The creature had a** *blue* **skin, and it swam with tail movements, its body erect above the waves, brandishing a fish. One of the eyewitnesses – the ship's doctor, J.P. Cortemünd – drew the scene in his diary, now preserved in the Royal Danish Library. (See: B. Holbek & I. Pio 1967, p85.)**

This observation closely corresponds to the group-sighting of a mermaid in the Faroe Islands *two years* **previously (see p20). Because both groups of witnesses – in 1670 and 1672 – were** *Danes*, **we can assume that we have to do with the circulation of the same motif among Danish colonists and seafarers; its function was to provide a traditional solution to vague observations at sea.**

Cortemünd's merman lost the immobility of a church carving so dramatically, that the doctor can even describe its manner of swimming. The insertion of an originally *symbolic* **motif into a** *natural* **setting also changes its sense. This is beautifully illustrated in the doctor's own drawing; the grasped fish formerly had the spiritual meaning of a human soul snared by the seductive, devilish mermaid (see: Benwell & Waugh 1961, p130). But here, the naturalness of the merman is** *enhanced by its surroundings* **and the gamboling real sea mammals, transforming church symbolism into zoological behaviour in a secularized representation of a fish-eater from the deep.**

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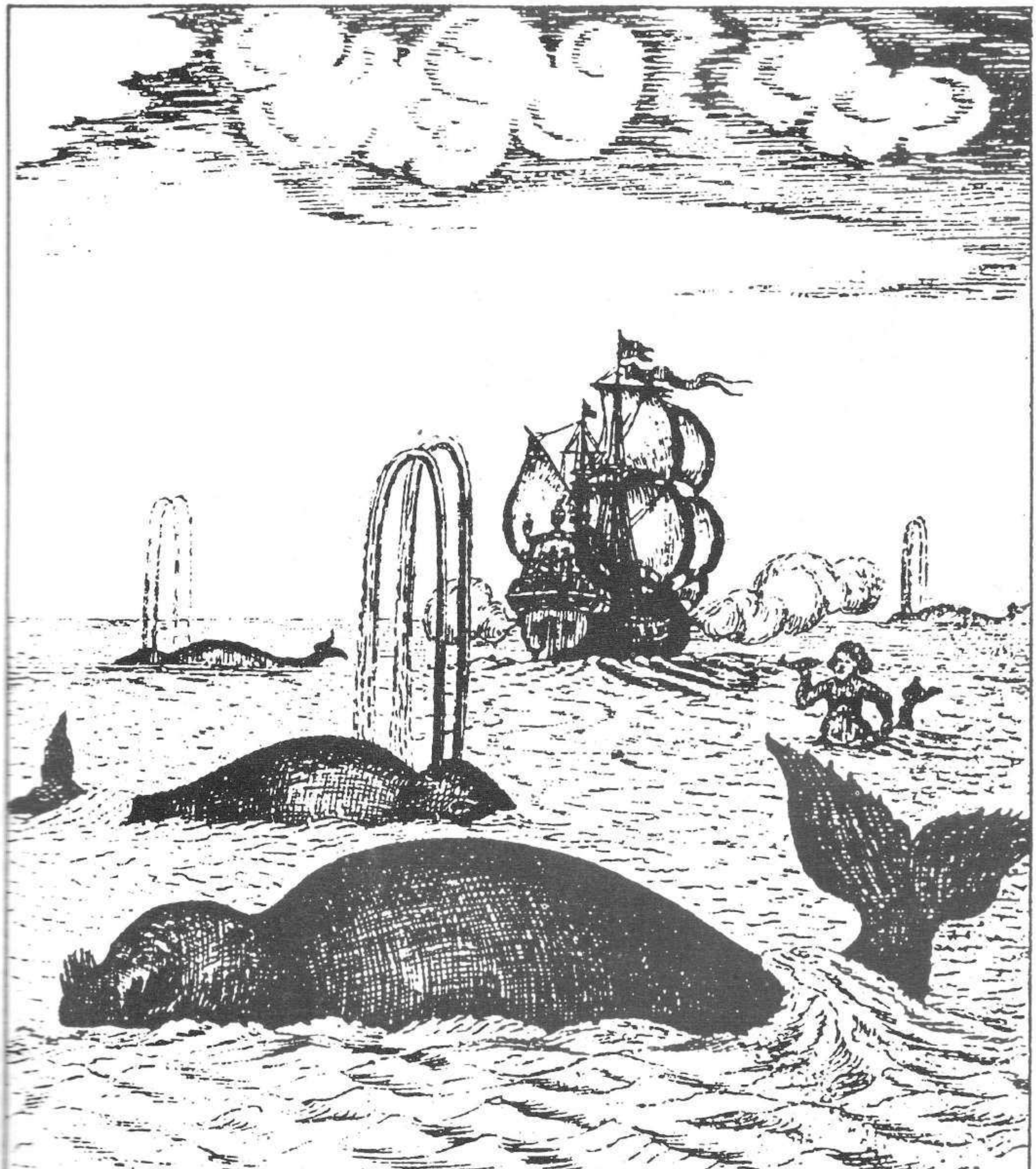
24 ■ See Thomas Bartholin 1657.
See also illustration and discussion at Chapter 4, p201.

25 ■ G. Benwell and A. Waugh 1961, p104.

26 ■ Bernard Heuvelmans, 'What is cryptozoology?', in *Cryptozoology*, vol 1 (Winter 1982), p2.

27 ■ R.P. Mackal 1980, p xi

28 ■ B. Heuvelmans 1975, p74.



For adepts of judicial 'evidence', Pontoppidan brings in an impressive document. It is the deposition made by three ferrymen of Elseneur during "an examination taken in the most regular and exact manner" by burgomaster Andrew Bussaeus. The witnesses describe a full-length merman as "like an old man, with short curled hair... with a black beard that looked as if it had been trimmed," and who sported a classical fish-tail. This account was given only *two months* after the sighting. A memory is fresher after two months than after six years, so why

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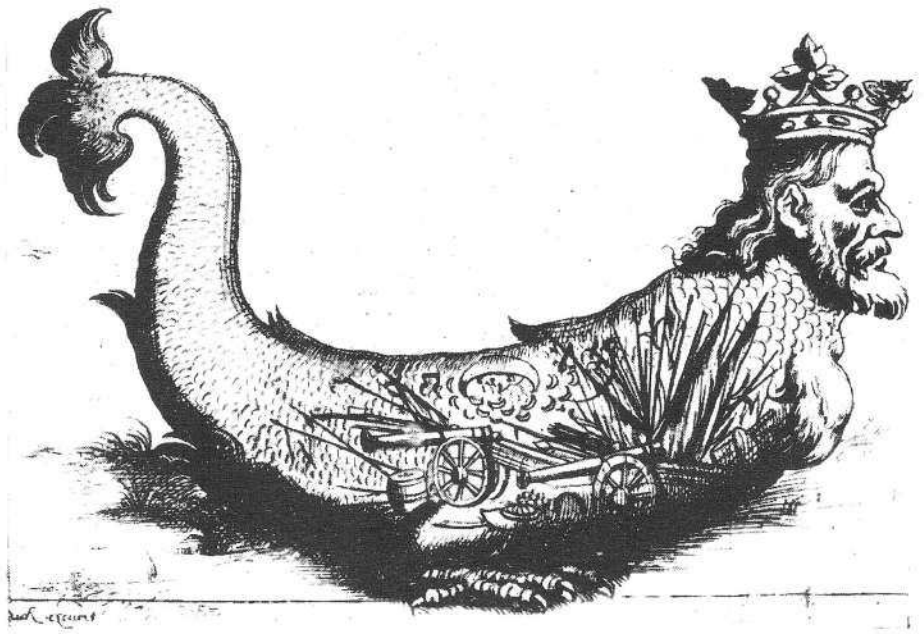
29 ■ Bernard Heuvelmans, 'What is cryptozoology?', in *Cryptozoology*, vol 1 (Winter 1982), p2.

30 ■ E. Pontoppidan 1755, p185.

31 ■ See, for example, the report of a merman near Ross, in 1953; in R.M. Robertson 1961, p98.



A crowned sea-monster, with the head of Neptune and the feet of a bird; from J.W. Schmuck, ***Fasculi*** **(1679).** [Fortean Picture Library]

should cryptozoologists accept von Ferry's story and ignore that of these ferrymen? Because they believe that mermen don't exist! But do sea-serpents really exist? It is very difficult to reconcile the bearded "old man", which was observed in "calm weather", with some sort of pinniped. He seems too human. But if some water monsters are not living animals, how can one explain the sighting?

If we study the morphology of these monsters we might find a partial answer. Just as the horse-headed sea-serpent was a stereotype of Scandinavian folklore, so the merman seen by the three ferrymen *corresponds closely to the artistic representations of Neptune*, the 'Old Man of the Sea' of 17th century marine maps. [32] Such documents were readily available to ferrymen and others. If we accept the report as a recollection then we are dealing with a *visionary experience.*

That *some* observations of mermaids can be explained as *cultural projections* is strengthened by a Danish report in which, according to the *History of the Faroes* (1670), by "provost" Lukas Debes, "There was seen at Faroe... a mermaid *close to the shore*. She stood *two hours and a half,* and was up to her navel in water. She had long hair on her head which hung down to the surface of the water all around her. *She held a fish, with the head downwards, in her right hand.*" [33] This description does not even come close to what might be expected of a sighting of a seal. A creature so distinct in its appearance from that of a pinneped, with "long hair", seen in excellent spatio-temporal conditions, at close quarters and for "two hours and a half", cannot be reduced by the usual rationalistic interpretations. Quoters Benwell and Waugh add this important commentary about this fish-carrying siren: "In this pose, the mermaid was frequently carved in medieval churches." [34]

Thus the visionary experience can supply some of the elements of explanation: the inhabitants of Faroe saw what was consistent with their cultural knowledge, *an artistic stereotype,* as a living creature, just as the ferrymen of Elseneur did, and perhaps even Lawrence von Ferry. Heuvelmans is mistaken in too sharply differentiating between "tradition" and "personal experience", trying to have us believe that "it is easy to dis-

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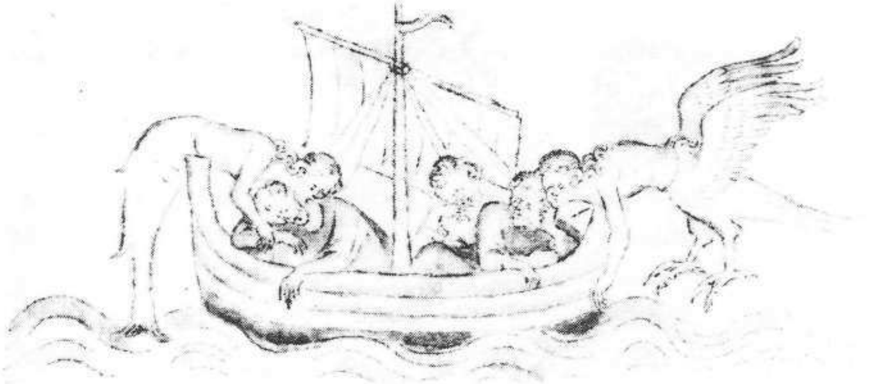
32 ■ G. Benwell and A. Waugh 1961, p228, plates 11a and 11b.

Recently, Heuvelmans expressed doubts about "the classical scientific explanation" of mermaids, because pinnipeds have no "pectoral mammae". He stated that: "Only a still unrecorded species of recent sirenia, or possibly – though much less likely – an unknown form of primate adapted to sea-life, could explain the abundance and persistence of merfolk reports in certain seas up to modern times." B. Heuvelmans, 'An annotated check-list of apparently unknown animals with which cryptozoology is concerned,' in *Cryptozoology*, vol 5 (1986), p6.

Here, Pontoppidan's merfolk surface again, but under the cautious term of "primate". This new naturalistic-anomalous interpretation though is as far from the truth as the more conventional one, when dealing with such sightings as that of the Elseneur ferrymen. In this case, the creature was too obviously human – a 'civilised' human, even – to be considered as some unknown sea-adapted primate. The merman of Elseneur, fresh from the hairdresser, belongs to art and not to zoology.

33 ■ G. Benwell and A. Waugh 1961, p100.

34 ■ *ibidem.*



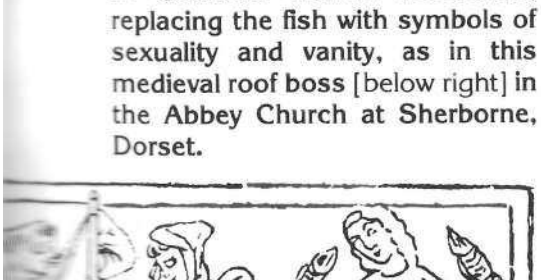
The evolution of the mermaid shows a typical transition of form from the protean to the particular, which is similar to the development of the phenomenon in the Selisbergsee (see Ch 5, Section 2).

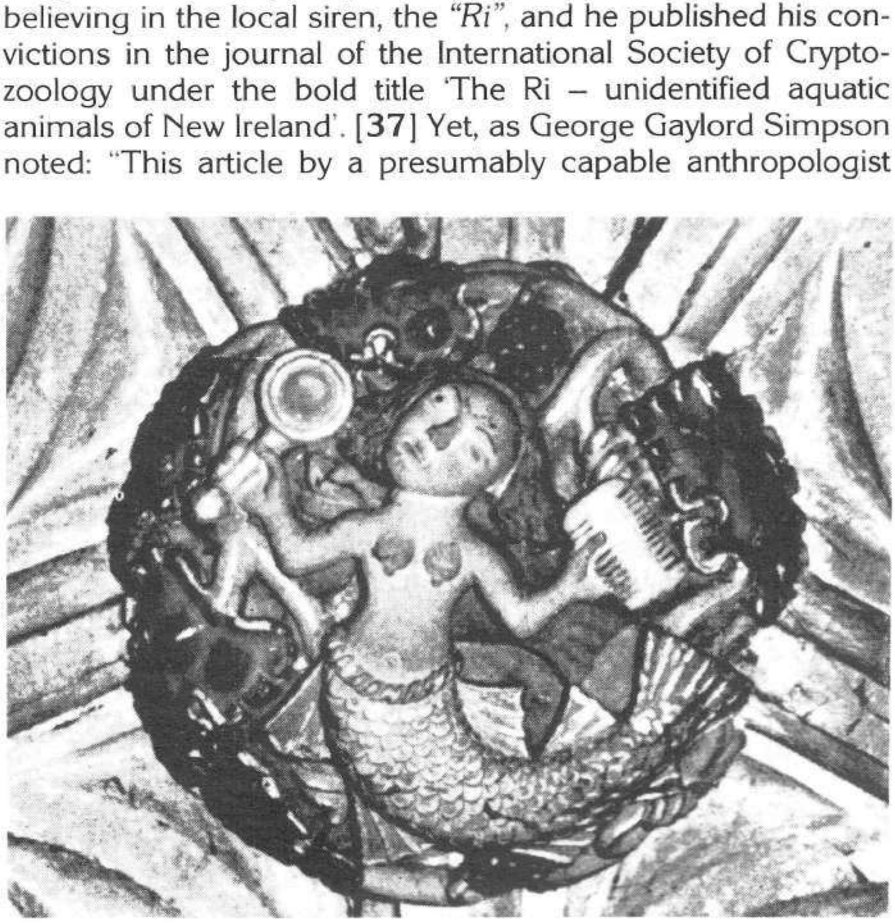
Jane Harrison (*Myths of the Odyssey in art and literature*, 1882) has shown that before Homer characterized the Sirens of the *Odyssey* as Harpy-like creatures, they were classed as *keres* (ghosts or demons). Gwen Benwell and Arthur Waugh (*The sea enchantress*, 1961) in turn, demonstrate that the portrayal of the Sirens as mermaids developed from the Hellenistic period into the Medieval era, and give several examples of 'transitional' forms which share the attributes of both birds and fishes. much like the Neptune on the previous page, and this 14th century drawing [top right] **from a manuscript in British Library.**

Originally, the mermaid was depicted in a formal pose, holding aloft a fish in each hand, as in this illustration [below left] **from a Latin bestiary (Harrison, 1882)** [Fortean Picture Library] **By the Middle Ages this iconography was modified further by the increased use of the mermaid motif as a visual homily in Christian church decoration, replacing the fish with symbols of sexuality and vanity, as in this medieval roof boss** [below right] **in the Abbey Church at Sherborne, Dorset.**

tinguish between the fable and the eyewitness account, thanks to the stereotyped aspect of the former." **[35]** Firstly, we have seen that there exists a great variety of *traditional experiences*. Secondly, it is difficult to recognise the naturalistic class of stereotype: a siren holding a fish would look quite realistic if we didn't have the benefit of the precision of Benwell and Waugh in linking the pose with a traditional architectural stereotype. A sea-serpent with the head and mane of a horse sounds so realistic that cryptozoologists class it into zoological categories; however, as we shall see, the famous mane can be explained precisely as a *cultural stereotype* not reserved solely for sea-monsters.

Are stereotypes really so easily detected as Heuvelmans seems to believe when he says: "No one is likely to mistake the traditional story told by a native for a personal testimony." **[36]** We have a recent proof to the contrary. Anthropologist Roy Wagner was completely misled by New Ireland natives into believing in the local siren, the *"Ri"*, and he published his convictions in the journal of the International Society of Cryptozoology under the bold title 'The Ri – unidentified aquatic animals of New Ireland'. **[37]** Yet, as George Gaylord Simpson noted: "This article by a presumably capable anthropologist





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35 ■ Bernard Heuvelmans, 'What is cryptozoology?', in *Cryptozoology*, vol 1 (Winter 1982), p11.

36 ■ *ibidem*.

37 ■ Roy Wagner, 'The Ri: unidentified aquatic animals of New Ireland, Papua New Guinea' in *Cryptozoology*, vol 1 (1982), p33–39.

posits a mammal that is not merely unknown but is impossible." [38] The Ri was 'only' a dugong. However Wagner, like the members of the Danish Commission of 1723, was convinced he saw one of these sirens.

If, as Heuvelmans claims, it is easy to distinguish between tradition and experience, it must be because he has a *static* concept of myth and speaks of "unchanging structures of mythical thought". [39] In this view myths and legends are simply archaisms, and as such are easily detectable. We have noted the infinite capacity of adaptation of the mythic thought: Heuvelmans is blind to the *modernity* of myth and to such phenomena as the rationalizing and scientification of folklore precisely because, for him, the more a document *seems* rational the more it is unmythicized. Indeed, new myths are often camouflaged as *conjectures*.

Heuvelmans sees the dragon as myth, but he does not accept the mythological dinosaurs of the media. The traditional character of a sighting experience, due to the high degree of naturalizing, is difficult to prove. Nevertheless, a study of the milieu is often very instructive. Cryptozoologists Leblond and Sibert have gathered a huge number of observations of sea-serpents along the coast of British Columbia. Among them, the water-horse type is "well attested". [40] One has to look towards the culture for a reason. Many Shetlanders settled in British Columbia, and the Shetlands had been colonized for a thousand years by Norwegians and remained in close contact with Norway until the 19th century. Folklorist J.A.Teit gathered a rich collection of sea-monster beliefs – including stories about the "water-horse" ("Nogle") – among British Columbians of Shetland descent. [41] Being aware of this cultural bond with Scandinavia, it is not surprising to learn from Leblond and Sibert that the name of one water-horse sighter in British Columbia is *Erickson* [see illustration above right]. [42]

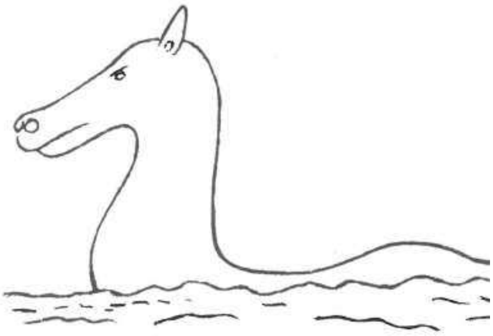
The water-horse belief is pre-existent to these sightings and helps to enhance everyday experiences. Heuvelmans tells of a collective observation of a "monster with a horse's head" by about 25 residents of Nanaimo, in British Columbia, on both 24 and 25 February 1954. [43] Yet the Canadian Fortean, Mr X, who checked additional newspaper reports, found the solution: while the crowd was wondering, five men went in a boat to take a photograph of the alleged monster only to find "a huge bull sea-lion and his current inamorata." [44]

Hence the *objective support* in the case of von Ferry's sea-serpent, as in the 1954 Nanaimo incident, could have been a common pinniped; but at the level of interpretation it had been modified by traditional stereotypes. This objective support is only the portmanteau of a powerful legendary representation; seals and logs and mirages *help a transitory naturalizing of belief*.

THE NATURALIZATION OF BELIEF

Is it possible to interpret some observations of lake monsters along the same lines? I think so; but we will have to fight the temptation of applying a 'total solution'. In dealing with Renaissance documents about lake monsters, for ex-

The 'water–horse' seen off the coast of British Columbia by Erickson; from P.H. Leblond and J. Sibert, *Observations of large unidentified marine animals in British Columbia...* **(1973).**



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38 ■ George Gaylord-Simpson, 'Mammals and cryptozoology,' in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol 128, N° 1 (30 March 1984), p14.

39 ■ Bernard Heuvelmans, 'What is cryptozoology?', in *Cryptozoology*, vol 1 (Winter 1982), p11.

40 ■ P.H. Leblond and J. Sibert, June 1973, pp12, 20 & 24.

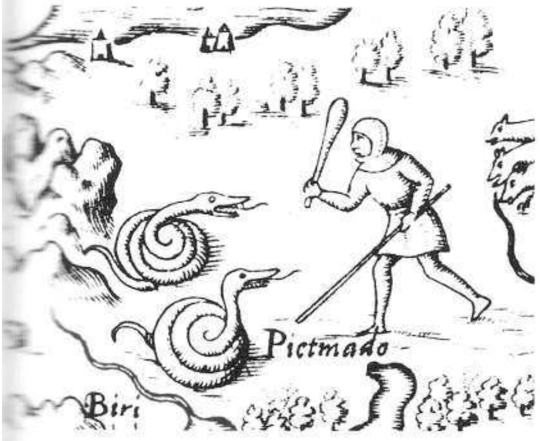
41 ■ J.A.Teit, 'Water-beings in Shetlandic folklore as remembered by Shetlanders in British Columbia,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 31, N° 119, p183–186.

42 ■ P.H. Leblond and J. Sibert, June 1973, p24.

43 ■ B. Heuvelmans 1975, p577f; 1968, p507.

Interestingly, the location of this incident was sacred to *Haietlik*, the serpent-demon of the Nootkas, as evidenced by vigorous petroglyphs – see the illustration on p169.

44 ■ Vancouver *Province* 25 February 1954, p1 (Credit: Mr. X).



A Finnish shepherd protecting his herd against giant snakes; from Olaus Magnus' *Carta marina* **(1539).** [Fortean Picture Library]

ample, we must cease identifying them, as the cryptozoologists do, as naturalistic reports, open to direct interpretation according to our present zoological knowledge. They are, in fact, *cultural puzzles* composed of diverse world-views. We have to carefully dismantle the puzzle to be able to understand the complexity of its structure.

One example will suffice. We have already noted Heuvelmans' mockery of Olaus Magnus' interpretation of lake monster sightings as *portents*. This Nordic cleric was expressing his opinion in connection with rumours about Lake Mjösa, near Hamar in Norway. If we use the *Hamar Chronicle* (1540) as an additional source, Magnus' concept appears to give a precise account of the *category* of report, which clearly belongs to the world of *prodigies*. According to the *Hamar Chronicle:*

"It happened once, at midnight, that all the bells started ringing in Hamar cathedral, and the organ began playing by itself... During the night there were so many ghosts in the episcopal residence, looking as if two armies had come into battle, that the watchmen and everyone were terrified. *At the same time,* in Lake Mjösa, a terribly large [lake] serpent appeared. It seemed to stretch all the way from Helgöy Island to the shore by Hamar. *At the same time,* a monstrously big, horned ox was seen going from Gillünd, in Stange, over the island. It looked *as if it walked on the water,* but nonetheless went straight ahead like an arrow from a steel bow. Day after day, [lake] serpents were seen as well. They writhed and *arched their backs up to the sky,* and afterwards came the most enormous [lake] serpent. It ran and played along the shore and at last it rushed up onto the rock outside the cloister at great speed. It came so far up out of the water that *it had difficulty getting loose from the rock.* Its eyes were as big as the bottom of a barrel, and it had *a long black mane* that hung down over its neck."

"Then one of the boys from the bishop's residence – he was a bold fellow – began shooting at the [lake] serpent's eyes with a bow and arrow... The [lake] serpent was *multicoloured* and a terrifying sight. At last it was killed by the arrows and lay there on the rock. The following night there was a violent rainstorm, so that the serpent came loose from the rock and floated over to Helgöy Island, and then there was *such a stink* that people sent for the bishop and asked how they were to be rid of the serpent and the smell. The bishop ordered that, from the surrounding parishes, each farm which usually paid two or more hides in tithes was to send one strong man. This they did... They worked together to burn up the hideous serpent so that people could be rid of the *poisonous stink* that came from it... Many hundreds of loads of wood were needed before the stink finally subsided. But the *bones* remained and lay there on the shore for many years. Then some able *artisans* came. They were allowed to take whatever they *could use.* A grown man could hardly carry a piece of the back-bone." [**45**]

I have quoted this text at length because it is exactly what excites cryptozoologists. In their customary *selective* way, they will suppress the bells and organ playing, the ghostly armies and the oxen walking on the water, cropping the whole to present to the reader a naturalistic scenario resembling a fantasy movie

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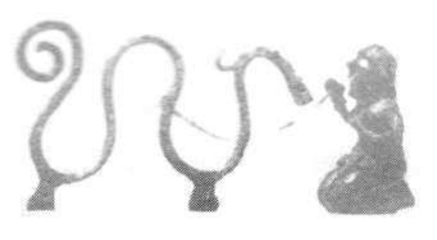
45 ■ Quoted by R.T. Christiansen 1964, p70–71.

episode *à la* John Milius, the mighty hero Conan battling a Great Serpent with his faithful bow.

This would be a gross distortion. Our text is precise in its assertion that the appearance of the lake serpents was *coincident* with the ghostly battle and coming of the monstrous ox. Therefore this conceptual unity must be kept in mind when analyzing the passage. François-Marc Gagnon and Denise Petel's study of the accounts of the voyages of Jacques Cartier (made between 1534–1542) [**46**] has helped us with the methodological approach to such Renaissance texts and warns us not to take them at face value because of the tendency of dominant knowledge to select only the aspects which confirm the Classics. Accordingly, the story in the *Hamar Chronicle* must be understood as a *reworking* of information. The editor of this Nordic document was not a modern journalist telling us of some *fait-divers* that happened in his vicinity. He was a *compiler*, with a total respect for the past, needing a scriptural and a classical warrant for each formulation. His whole material is *filtered* through complex channels of adjustment, and the apparent factuality comes from a literary working out.



Bronze Age sculpture of a woman worshipping a horse–headed serpent, found at Faardal; from Carl Axel Althin, *Studien zu den Bronzezeitlichen Felszeichnungen von Skåne I Lund* **(1945).**

Our interpretation has to be *relativistic*, isolating each constituent part of a cultural mosaic with elements from erudite and popular cultures, the Renaissance literature of prodigies and Norwegian folklore. The spectral battle is one of the most common prodigies of the period. [**47**] Other motifs are legendary and can be found in Norwegian folklore. The *stretching* of the monster's body over the great distance between the island and the foreshore can be found in traditional lore [**48**], as can the misadventure of the beast becoming stuck in some narrow place. [**49**] Contrary to Heuvelmans' analysis, the legendary character of such episodes, in fact, is so hard to detect that a variant of this story – collected in the 1960s by monster-hunter Ted Holiday in south-west Ireland – was interpreted by cryptozoologists as *fact*. [**50**] Roy Mackal even took careful measurements of the culvert in which the creature had allegedly been trapped! [**51**] The awful smell is another traditional motif. Norwegian story-tellers even claim that the stench of rotting water monsters is so dreadful that "leaves drop from the trees". [**52**]

Lastly, the motif of the monster's bones used by artisans is well represented in Norway: eg. "a milking stool" was made from the bones of the monster of Lake Gausbü, in the Telemark region. [**53**] One can compare this with the "grain bin" at the Hjelmeland parsonage, fashioned from a "water-horse's hoof". [**54**] In search of similar exhibits, Bishop Pontoppidan "asked the favour" of a a slip of a table-cover, allegedly made from "the skin of one of these (sea) snakes". [**55**] Similar trophies of bones and hides can be found in French, English [**56**], and Italian [**57**] dragon legends.

In the *Hamar Chronicle* the sequential apparition of the biggest monster *after* the swarm of smaller ones is also modelled upon legendary patterns. One is reminded, for instance, of the well-known 'snake-charmer' type of story, in which the magician exorcises a plague of snakes, compelling the troop of tiny ones to depart, then comes the biggest one, the dreaded

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46 ■ F.M. Gagnon and D. Petel 1986.

47 ■ See, among others, S. Goulart 1628, vol 1, p870.

48 ■ Elisabeth Skjelsvik, 'Norwegian lake and sea monsters,' in *Norveg Folkelivsgransking*, vol 7 (1960), p36.

49 ■ *ibidem*, p31–32.
See also: T.Å. Bringsvaerd 1979, p62.

50 ■ F.W. Holiday 1973, p54.
Several other incidents of monsters trapped by a narrow passage are referred to by Holiday; eg. one jammed under a bridge near Ballynahinch Castle (Holiday p71–72).

51 ■ R.P. Mackal 1976, p39.

52 ■ Elisabeth Skjelsvik, 'Norwegian lake and sea monsters,' in *Norveg Folkelivsgransking*, vol 7 (1960).

53 ■ T.Å. Bringsvaerd 1979, p62.
See also: Elisabeth Skjelsvik, 'Norwegian lakes and sea monsters,' in *Norveg Folkelivsgransking*, vol 7 (1960), who mentions a water-serpent's vertebrae used to support a stable at Ådal.

54 ■ T.Å. Bringsvaerd 1979, p65.

55 ■ E. Pontoppidan . 1755, p200–201.

56 ■ For example: the *skin* of a "monster worm" allegedly suspended in olden times in Sexhow Church, Yorkshire; F.W. Holiday 1973, p91.

57 ■ A "dragon's skull" – obviously crocodilian – is conserved in the monastery at Santa Fiora, Italy; U. Cordier 1986, p126, *'lindorm', the giant serpent with a horse's mane.* [58]

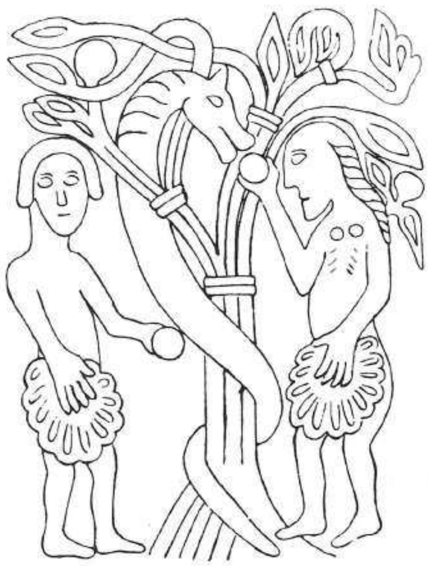
To unravel the puzzle further, let us consider the specific Lake Mjösa representation. The beast's abode is of utmost importance. It is an island, the name of which contains the radicle *'helg'*, conveying an original concept of sanctity or sacrality (*'helga'*, *'helig'*). Other variants of the 'stretching lake monster' show head and tail positions related to precise locations, eg. the *stone* near Lake Osen (Telemark) called *'Ormnesstten'* (the serpent's stone). Olaus Magnus identified Lake Mjösa's island as the permanant lair of the monster. [59]

Therefore, it seems that we are dealing with a *sacralized topography*, which, in the time of the *Hamar Chronicle*, was becoming a natural one. Hilda Ellis Davidson has shown that as a primary concept, the Nordic dragon is a giant snake guarding burial mounds. [60] The tombs of kings and princes can also be situated on islands. A passage in 12th century Saxo Grammaticus' *Danish History* tells us how the hero Fridleif fought a "dragon" or "serpent" that rose out of the sea to protect the treasure of a burial chamber on an *island* off the Norwegian coast.

Originally, the monstrous serpent of Lake Mjösa seems to have been conceived as *a "watcher on the threshold" of a sacred place.* From pagan creature to Renaissance prodigy to a naturalistic animal is a long way, but this is hardly an isolated case. Even in the 17th century, the lake itself still preserved some aspects of its original sacrality. According to a report from about AD 1600. Lake Mjösa "is a treacherous and deceptive body of water and *takes many people away.* It is muddy and frightening to behold, and it is more dangerous to sail upon than the sea because of the great *whirlwinds* and squalls that come, and because fresh water is more easily agitated than salt water. *For this reason people are so superstitious of this same lake,* that whenever they journey across it, *they will not call it by its name,* Mjösa, but speak of it instead as 'the fjord'." [61] We found in Québec the same association between natural dangers and cultural constructions about some lakes. This complex interplay of Nature and Culture I have baptized **the mythical landscape.** [62] At Mjösa the fear had gone so far as to create a *vocal taboo.*

In comparison we must reconsider the representation of the 'maned serpent'. A study of Scandinavian pagan religion reveals that this image is a *cult* figure of *incredible age.* Since the Bronze Age (2000–1800 BC) we find engravings of maned serpents on Nordic bronze razors; and one sculpture, found in Faardal, in Jutland, shows a woman suckling and worshipping a vertically undulating serpent [see illustration]. The creature has a horse's head. Maringer [63] insists upon the mythic representation of the "horse-serpent" displacing the serpent body and the horse's head. Sometimes these cult-images have *horns.* Serpents with horse's heads also appear on Gallic coins. [64] In Scandinavia, the medieval dragonesque style (11th and 12th centuries) offers a combination of horse and serpent, and the dragon's heads decorating Norwegian stave churches have equine characteristics. [65] One can find horse-headed serpents depicted in most countries colonized by Vikings, like England, where a 12th century font at Cotham incorporates this motif

This early Christian font carving from Cotham, Nottinghamshire, shows Adam and Eve being tempted by a horse-headed serpent, with the distinctive ears and mane of a *lindorm.* It is an excellent example of the spread and influence of the Scandinavian imagery. Drawing after a rubbing, from J. Romilly Allen, *Early Christian symbolism...* **(1887).** [Fortean Picture Library]



58 ■ R.T. Christiansen 1958, p48–52.

59 ■ O. Magnus 1555, p771, 'Serpens in insula Moos... '.

60 ■ Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, 'The hill of the dragon: Anglo-Saxon burial mounds in literature and archæology,' in *Folklore*, London, vol LXI (December 1950), p169–185.

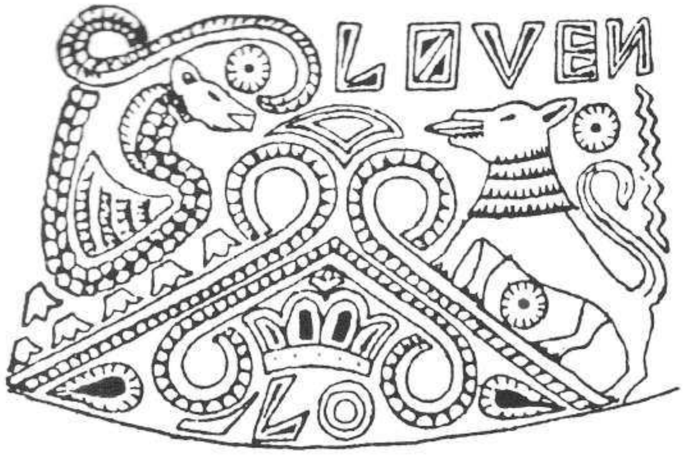
61 ■ R.T. Christiansen 1964, p70.

62 ■ See Chapter 2, Section 4.
A concise exposition is given in Appendix 7.

63 ■ Johannes Maringer, 'Die Schlange in Kunst und Kult der vorgeschichtlichen Menschen,' in *Anthropos: Internationale Zeitschrift für Völker und Sprachenkunde*, Freiburg / Schweiz, vol 72 (1977), p899–902.

64 ■ L. Lengyel 1969, p91.

65 ■ See A. Anderson 1968, vol 2, p365. Letter from Sven Rosén, 28 February 1987.



A horse–headed Lindorm on a powderhorn from Omlied, Telemark, Norway, dated c1759; from P. Paulsen, *Drachenkampfer...* **(1966).**

upon the serpent of Eden. **[66]** The Nordic dragon, or *'lindorm'*, is traditionally represented as a serpent with a horse's head in Norwegian folk-art, as exemplified by the engraving on a powder horn at Omlied [see illustration].

Bearing all this in mind, the 'classical' descriptions given by Olaus Magnus and Pontoppidan, interpreted by cryptozoologists as realistic portraits of unknown animals, can, with some probability, be seen as cultural reworkings of visionary experiences. In this view the vertical undulations of sea-serpents, considered by Heuvelmans as proof of the mammalian nature of the animal, can be interpreted as a *cultural stereotype*, like the stretching and the horse's mane, traditionally transmitted through generations and brought to North America by European colonists.

Far from being reserved solely for serpentine monsters, the celebrated mane is, indeed, a *general* emblem of various sorts of water-*spirits*, such as the Scottish humanoid *'Fuath'*. **[67]** In Finland, the water-man *'Nökk'*, who shows himself as a log, can be distinguished from profane trunks by the mane he sports. **[68]** The *continuity* of Norwegian motifs and their migration to North America can be demonstrated by two modern stories.

Firstly, a recent sighting (August 1986) in Lake Seljord, the Norwegian 'Loch Ness', closely corresponds to the "rings" of lake-serpents of the *Hamar Chronicle*. From the calm waters of the lake [see illustration] Aasmund Skori saw a sort of "bow" emerge. "The bow was one and a half metres long, as thick as a thigh and looked deep black," he said. "The body divided the water in front, and behind it the lake was frothing... As I drew near, approximately 10-20 metres, it sank into the depths." **[69]** If the reader will compare Skori's account with my interview with Noé Viens **[70]**, he will notice the same sort of dark-coloured "bow" has been observed in the 1940s in a Québecian lake. These strange geometrical forms, perhaps produced by a mirage effect under precise climatic conditions, nevertheless *support* the belief in the local *'Seljordsorm'* (the Seljord serpent) or *'Bête du lac'*.

66 ■ J. Romilly-Allen 1887.

67 ■ L. Spence 1948. p23.

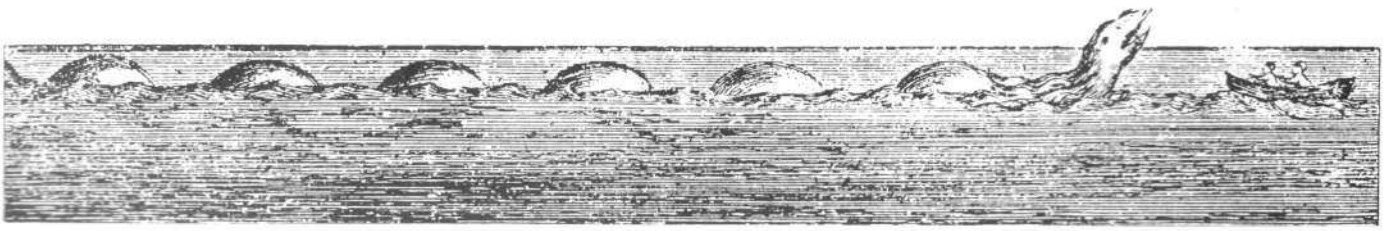
68 ■ U. Holmberg 1964

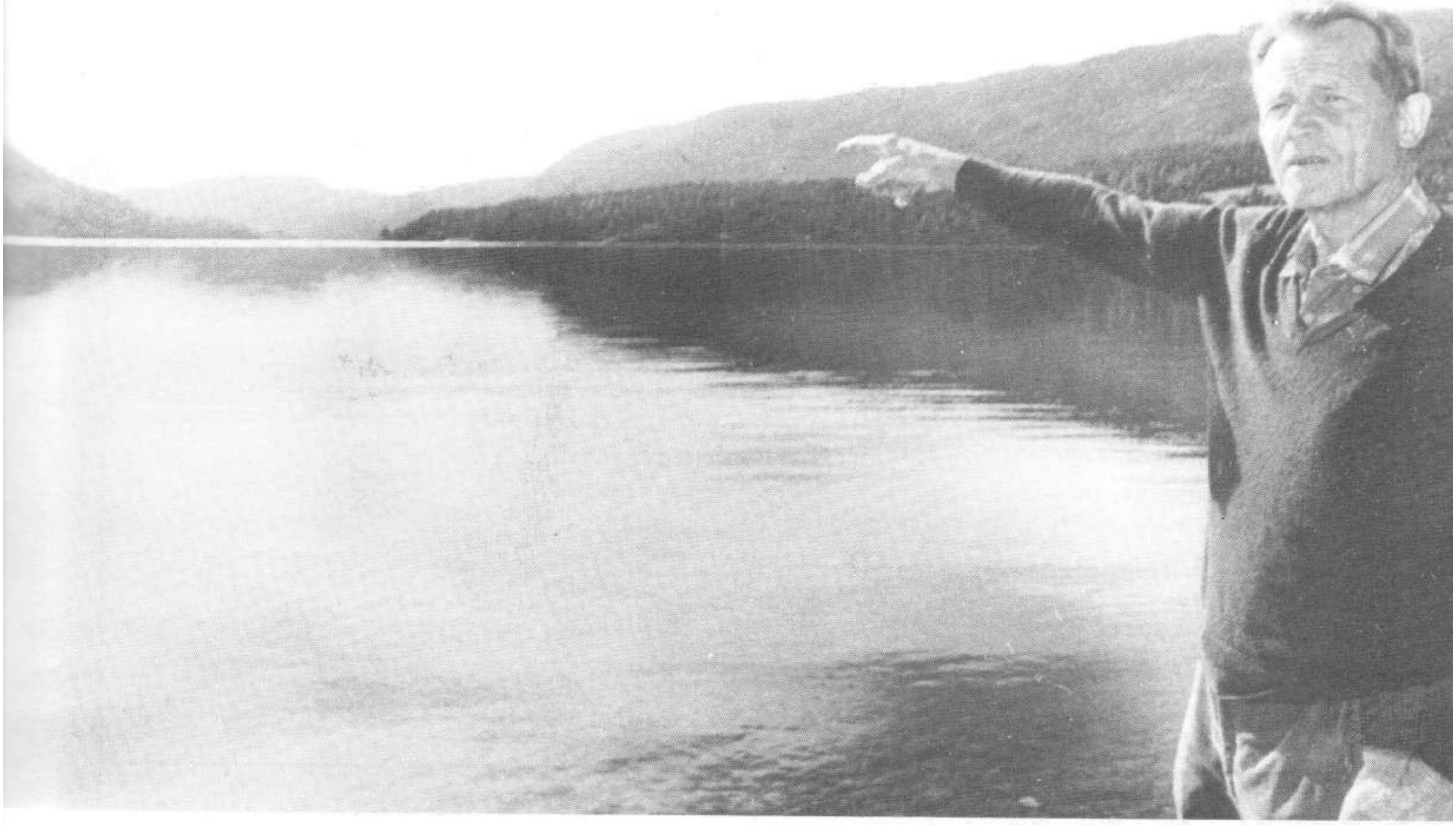
69 ■ Telemark *Arbeiderblad* 7 August 1986, p16.

70 ■ See Chapter 1, p92.

Below: **Reconstruction of the Norwegian sea-serpent; from a drawing sent to Pontoppidan by the minister Hans Ström. (Pontoppidan 1753).** [Fortean Picture Library]

The classical looping arcs or humps of the aquatic form of the monster correspond to the immense vertical "orbs" distinguishing dragon-snakes from profane reptiles in age-old representations from Scandinavia. One can therefore consider such humps – like the long flowing mane – as an originally symbolic characteristic which became, through oral transmission, a fixed element in the pattern of description of such creatures, repeated in later interpretations of sightings.





Aasmund Skori pointing to the part of Norway's Lake Seljord where he saw the *Seljordsorm.* [Courtesy of *Telemark Arbeiderblad* ©]

In other words, if we interpret the *Hamar Chronicle* story, we could say that instead of seeming to report an animalic *fact*, it is a literary re-working of rumours, partly organized, as we have seen, around Norwegian folklore, while also remaining in strict *concordance* with *classical models*. Indeed, when its editor states that the "lake serpent was multicoloured", this erudite scholar had to be aware of Virgil's rendering of the colour of the serpent in Anchise's tomb:

> "More *various colours* through his body run
> than Iris when her *bow* imbibes the sun. " [**71**]

Another passage in the *Æneid* is equally important; the story of the suffocation of Laocoon by two serpents which came from the sea. Virgil uses the phrase "serpents with bloody 'juba'". 'Juba' is generally, but not always, translated as 'crest'. Heuvelmans, allured by the colour of the "bloody crests", tries to identify these creatures as the oarfish. [**72**] However, H. Kleinknecht, a specialist in classical philology, proposes a more accurate translation. According to him 'juba', in this case, means 'mane', and he cites a passage from Titus Livius in which a number of witnesses "in the city of Rome" observe the prodigy of a "serpent with a mane". [**73**]

It is difficult to imagine an oarfish frolicking in the streets

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71 ■ Dryden's rendering, quoted by F. Gibson 1904, p93.

72 ■ B. Heuvelmans 1975, p42–43; 1968, p84.

73 ■ H. Kleinknecht, 'Laocoon,' in *Zeischrift für klassische Philologie*, vol 79 (1944), p66–111.

The problem is complicated by the name of the Mauritanian King Juba II, who, before Pliny, wrote a natural history in Greek mentioning "crested dragons"; see B. Heuvelmans 1968, p83.

of Rome! As Kleinknecht convincingly suggests, the *red* colour of the serpent's appendage closely resembles the reptile's eye colour; *"ardentis oculos suffecti sanguine at igni"* ("burning eyes, blood and fire shot") as described by Virgil. These two substances (fire and blood) also feature in their own distinct prodigies. Virgil's maned serpents are very similar to the Nordic *lindorm* and also correspond to the creatures described by Olaus Magnus and the Hamar chronicler. The *"ardentis oculos"* of Virgil matches the *"oculos rutilantes"* ("flaming, shining eyes") of the serpent of coastal Norway described by Olaus Magnus. **[74]** The reddish eye-colour of Magnus' monster stands in direct relationship to its supernatural origin.

Another proof that Magnus and the unknown editor of the *Hamar Chronicle* are following classical models in their organization of folkloric elements is offered by the description of the Lake Mjösa serpents in the *Hamar Chronicle*: they "arch their backs up to the sky". Magnus mentions a further observation of the monster of Mjösa in 1522, noting that it was *"in modum spheræ convoluens"*; a Latin phrase translated by Edward Topsell, in 1608, as "rouls himself round like a *sphere*". **[75]** This description did not please the rationalists. The first modern biographer of the sea-serpent, A.C. Oudemans, flatly proposed, in 1892, to interpret it as a "misprint" (!) and to read the phrase instead as *"in modum* spiræ *convoluens*" meaning "circling like a spire" or "round in coils". Oudemans argues that this evidently signifies that the observer saw the beast "swimming with vertical undulations". **[76]** Here we see the

Continued on p30.

A critical analysis of the interesting book by Halvor Sandsdalen on the monster of Lake Seljord (H.J. Sandsdalen, *Ormen i Seljordsvatnet*, 1976) helps us understand the modern representation of monsters as the fusion of images of several fabulous creatures originally clearly differentiated in Norwegian folklore: the water-horse (*Havhest*) and the *lindorm*.

The traditional *Havhest* – often represented in Scandinavian folk-art as a horse-fish hybrid with a stylistic stereotype of a *curved* fish-tail, as on this 17th century *kubbstol* **or seat carved from a tree-trunk** [see page opposite]**, from the vicarage at Ål, Buskerud parish,** Norway [© Nordiska Museet, Stockholm] – **was originally conceived as a denizen of the sea and was an arch-enemy of the sea-serpent. The** *lindorm*, **a land snake blown to gargantuan proportions, became the sea-serpent in the final stage of its mutation.**

Sandsdalen's book attests that the two rival forms and united into the Seljord's monster-complex, the oldest one being the water-horse, allegedly seen since 1750 (Sandsdalen p10-11). The cultural migration of a Norwegian sea-monster into an inland lake – comparable to the integration of the sea-cow into the monster-complex of Lake Pohéhégamook (see Chapter 4, Section 4, p224ff) – has even respected the artistic stereotype of the coiling fish-tail of the Ål *kubbstol*. According to tradition, the first steamboat captain on the Seljord, Hans Klokkarstogo, saw the monster at the end of the 19th century and described it as a strange "fish" with a horse's mane and a fish-tail (Sandsdalen p18).

As in the case of the Faroe's mermaid with fish in hand [see p20] **the water-horse of the Seljord is tributary of a fixed stylization of art. People are using the familiar images of church carvings and folk-art to elaborate vague sightings. But today, the original description of the Seljord's monster as a "water-horse" is in a minority; for example, in 1963, Torge Lindstøl, allegedly saw a creature whose head was similar to a horse-head in the lake (Sandsdalen p25).**

The legend of the progressive mutation of the *lindorm* has been adapted to the local topography of the Seljord; a tiny lake is said to be the original cradle of the monster, which migrated to the larger Lake Seljord to develop into its mature form (Sandsdalen p10). The snaky form of the creature is dominant, and Aasmund Skori's report is fairly representative of the mainstream (see also Sandsdalen p32).

No doubt the sea-serpent ideology plays a great part in the supremacy of the 'Great Snake' image. The Seljord's saga also includes an element of the Euro-American mythical landscape: the bodies of some drowned people have never been seen again (Sandsdalen p14-15) [see also Chapter 2, Section 4 of the present book].

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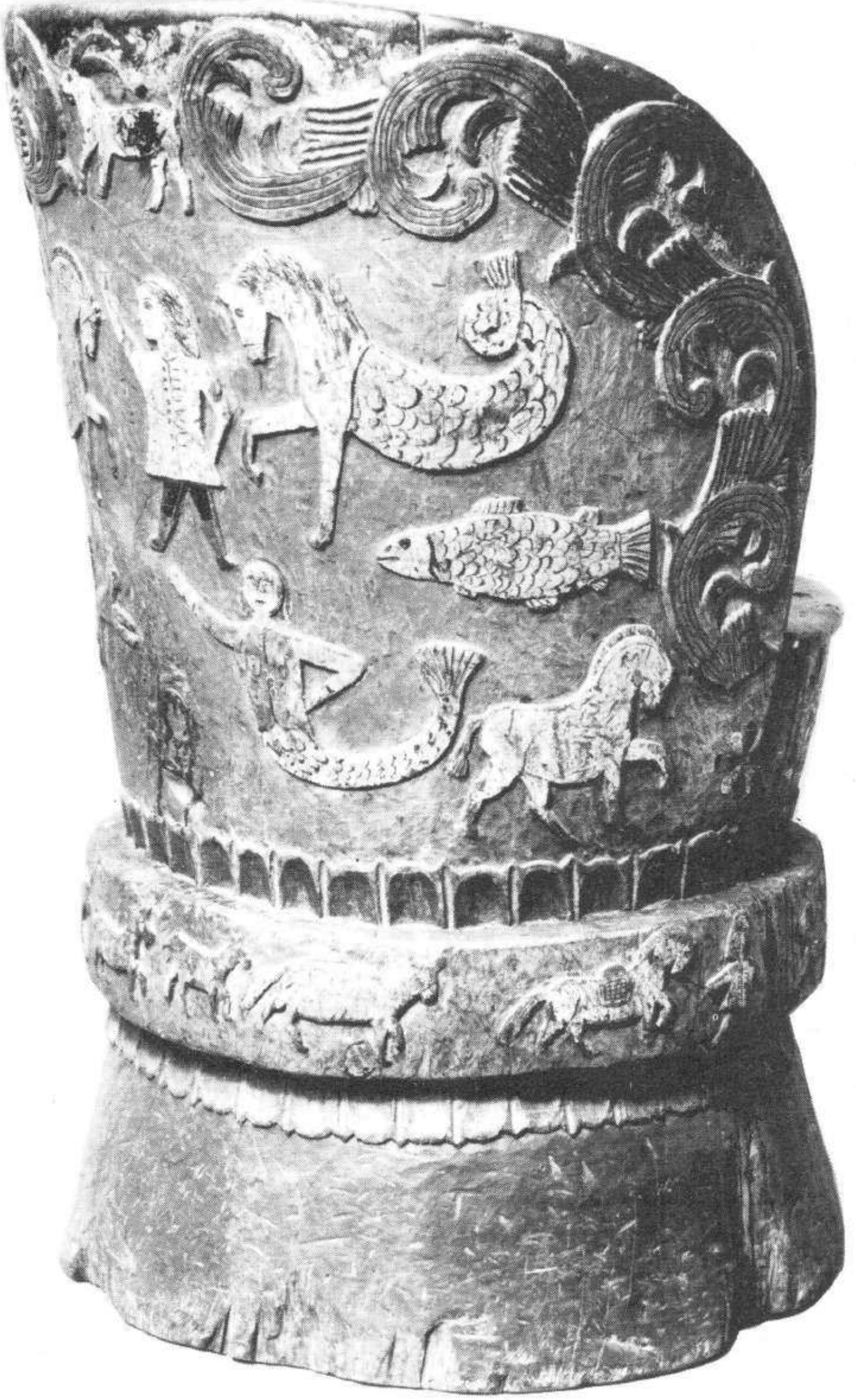
74 ■ Quoted by J. Ashton 1895, p270. The full passage of Topsell's (1608) translation of Olaus Magnus is also given in B. Heuvelmans 1968, p92.

75 ■ See: J. Ashton 1895, p270.

76 ■ A.C. Oudemans 1892, p105.



cherished mammalian progression; a clear example of wishful thinking, picked up in turn by Heuvelmans. [**77**]

In fact this was no "misprint". Describing the monster of the coast of Bergen, Magnus offers us a portrait of the traditional *lindorm* with "hair hanging from his neck a cubit long", that is to say some sort of giant *snake* and *not* an unknown mammalian creature. The Bishop of Upsala insists on the reptilian "sharp scales" of the monster and locates the creature, like the *lindorm*, in "holes" *near*, and *not in*, the sea.

Erik Pontoppidan Bishop of Bergen (1698–1764).

As a *snake*, the monster of Bergen is credited with a legendary propensity; the ability to take its tail into its mouth and to roll like a living wheel. [**78**] Uno Holmberg found in Finland, in our century, a thriving belief about sea-serpents appearing "as wheels" [**79**], and Pontoppidan records the prowess of the Norwegian sea-serpent that "sometimes encloses ships by laying itself round them in a *circle*" [**80**], a feat that would be impossible for a creature with a rigid backbone such as a seal, but feasible for a giant snake. All these windings and curvings make sense as typically *prodigious* manifestations. Brigitte Grassmann-Fischer proves that the character of the prodigy of Laocoon's attacking serpents lies in their *"immensibus orbibus"* ("immense rings"); the act of forming a giant *arc*, which distinguishes the progression of these serpents from the common snakes. [**81**]

This "arc" reminds us of the "bow" seen by Aasmund Skori in Lake Seljord. In the *Hamar Chronicle* account, the Mjösa serpents made two kinds of complementary movements: an arching of the back and a horizontal stretching. Olaus Magnus depicts this stretching as a movement towards the sky, like the verticle surging of a pole from the waters: "he puts up his head on high like a pillar". Here, he clearly remembers a passage from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* in which the serpent, first curved in a bow, then "rears itself like a vertical tree trunk". [**82**]

There is a close correspondence between Renaissance descriptions of Nordic monsters and humanist literature. These texts were not free reports of real events, but syncretic fabrications, integrating scholarly elements with Nordic folk-culture. They were therefore *compromises* between academic learning and oral tradition, fixed in the specific category of wonder literature.

Another proof of the folk-concept of the Lake Mjösa monster as a giant snake or *lindorm* is given in a text of 1636, dealing with the *migration* from Lake Mjösa of a giant water snake resembling a "longboat's mast" [**83**], and illustrates the Norwegian belief in the origin of lake and water serpents. Originally these were common land snakes, condemned to search for more congenial surroundings, firstly in lakes and then in the sea as their size increased enormously. [**84**] It is possible that Magnus' beast of Bergen was conceived as one of these creatures in its final stage. Pontoppidan gives us a testimony of this belief:

"It is said *by the people* who inhabit the coast [of Bergen] that [sea-serpents] are *not generated in the sea, but on land;* and when they are grown so big that they cannot move about on the rocks, they then *go into the sea and afterwards attain their*

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77 ■ B. Heuvelmans 1975, p53; 1968, p91.

78 ■ For the snake portrayed as a living wheel in American folklore see the 'Hoop Snake' of the lumberjacks, in R. Barber and A. Riches 1971, p85.

See also the illustrations on p237, p261, and p262.

79 ■ U. Holmberg 1913.

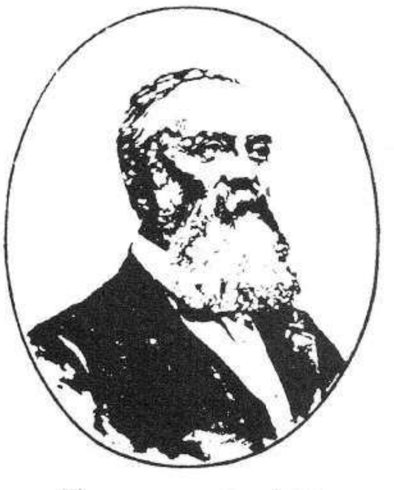
80 ■ E. Pontoppidan. 1755, p200–201.

81 ■ B. Grassmann-Fischer 1966, p78-79.

82 ■ Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, III, 26:94.

83 ■ See Chapter 2, p149.

84 ■ Elisabeth Skjelsvik, 'Norwegian lake and sea monsters,' in *Norveg Folkelivsgransking*, vol 7 (1960), p30.



G O Hyltén-Cavallius

Gunnar Olof Hyltén–Cavallius. [Fortean Picture Library]

full growth. I cannot persuade myself to believe this last account, for salt water is not agreeable to the nature of land creatures, and the sea-snake is generated, without doubt, in the sea, according to the nature of fish and other creatures of the ocean. If that may be, which *many of the farmers* hereabout declare, they have seen *snakes of several fathoms length;* or if there be truth in their accounts, who, from uncertain relations, *describe the lindorm, or great snake,* it is most probable that creature would sooner go to fresh water, in case it could not move about much longer on dry land. In Ulland parish there is a lake of middling size which is *said to have in it these snakes*, and the lake *Store Mjös* [= the big lake at Mjösa], in Hedemarken, is long and deep enough for the largest ship." [**85**]

For rationalistic reasons – "salt water not agreeable to land creatures" – Pontoppidan rejects the notion of the sea-serpent as an enlarged snake. Of the *lindorm* he selects only the sea-serpent aspects, rejects reports of giant land snakes and holds his tongue about Norwegian lake monsters. In a way, *today's familiar image of the sea-serpent is a creation of the Enlightenment,* part of a huge cycle about a legendary Nordic snake. The farmers' testimonies, rejected by Pontoppidan, found a more sympathetic ear in the following century. This hunter of the great *lindorm* was the Swedish folklorist Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius, the perfect representative of the Nordic intelligentsia attempting to revitalize the heroic age of 'sagas'. Hyltén-Cavallius' concepts about personifications of Nature had a deep influence upon Swedish painters. [**86**]

A DRAGON-HUNT IN SWEDEN

In 1868, Hyltén-Cavallius published his theory that the *trolls* of Scandinavian legends were relics of a dark-skinned, hairy prehistoric race. [**87**] No doubt this interpretation helped him to understand, along rationalistic-anthropologic lines, the condemnation of the Swedish labourer in 1691 for "illicit intercourse with a wood spirit". Hyltén-Cavallius also tried to interpret the Scandinavian dragon in zoological terms. Convinced of its *present* existence in some Swedish 'Lost World', he decided to organize a *lindorm* hunt in Småland, a region of Sweden where sighting reports were numerous and recent. The time for such an enterprise had come; it began in 1883 and lasted until 1885. The next hunt took place ten years afterwards, in Jämtland, during which the hunters pursued the creature of Lake Storsjön, armed with a huge iron trap. [**88**]

These quests had an ideological background. The dragon's lair was, on one level, *a refuge against modernity*. Sweden was industrializing at enforced speed. The folklorists' models of idealized peasants were proletarianised. Tracts of the deep and dark forests of legend were falling under the axe. Class conscience grew. In 1879, Sundsvall, a town at the heart of the timber industry, saw the first important Swedish strike, and troops were sent against the workers. Inquiries about working conditions of women and children appeared. In place of the poetic dreams of natural waterfalls, the Swedish bourgeoisie found a nightmare of social cataracts, as prophesied by Johan August Strindberg in 1879. [**89**]

85 ■ E. Pontoppidan 1755, p39.

86 ■ See M. Rossholm 1974, p37.

87 ■ G.O Hyltén-Cavallius 1868, vol 2, p127ff.

88 ■ U. Oscarsson 1986 p16–19; and P. Olsson 1899.

89 ■ See I. Andersson 1973, p291–297.

Into this shifting world, Hyltén-Cavallius tried to restore the stability of tradition by capturing a specimen of the Norse dragon and putting it before the gaze of the sceptical scientific community. In his search for witnesses of the *lindorm* he travelled all around Småland. The hunt was a failure. His posters offering a substantial reward for the remains of dragons found no takers.

Nevertheless, in 1883, the folklorist published his *Om draken eller lindormen* (On the dragon, also called the *lindorm*), followed by an enlarged edition in the *Transactions of the Royal Academy of Sciences* (1885). I will refer to the latter version, which contains the depositions of 48 witnesses. Hyltén-Cavallius' method is the *judicial* one; we are presented with sworn and signed declarations and the validity of the signatures is confirmed by local citizens. These precautions illustrate the same shortcomings we have observed in Heuvelmans' dealings with the deposition of Captain von Ferry. The socializing of testimonies about monsters illustrates only the power of collective belief upon the individual conscious.

Like von Ferry and his men, Hyltén-Cavallius' witnesses had no difficulty in standing as advocates of creatures whose existence was an admitted fact in their community. Their own accounts were oaths of allegiance to tradition. But group pressure can go further. Twenty-four of Hyltén-Cavallius' cases involved more than one witness, and a prevailing number of statements tell of old experiences which took place in the 1870s, others in the 1860s, and even three from around 1820! People were remembering childhood adventures, probably enhancing them as they went along. In the event of a collective observation, the supporters of the traditional *lindorm* interpretation would have had an easy task to convince the undecided, due to the coherency of their beliefs. This social process explains the traditional character of those *lindorm* encounters. These reports should not be interpreted as commonplace experiences in which chance and free will are dominant, but rather as some *mimicry*, structuralized by a traditional symbolism, including at times a precise *numerology*. **[90]** But were these encounters actually experienced at a symbolic level, or is the symbolic aspect only a by-product of posterior cultural pressure? *We cannot answer this capital question.*

In a splendid article, Sven Rosén tends to see these reports as *"hallucinatory experiences"*. **[91]** In fact, because of the considerable amount of elapsed time between the alleged experiences and the depositions, we cannot be certain that the occurrences took place as they were *related*. The secondary process of adjusting to traditional patterns may have been more important than the primary hallucination. These 19th century *lindorm* descriptions blend archaic and modern elements. The traditional attributes of the monster are preserved, but the creature is now conceived more as a *snake* than as a supernatural creature. Will-Erich Peuckert, describing the process of the naturalization of dragons, asserts that, since the 16th century, "theriomorphic demons have lost some of their demonic characteristics. *They are increasingly seen as 'beasts'*." **[92]**

In Småland, we can examine this end process. The creature

Opposite: **In the Castle of Fear, by the treacherous light of the moon, an old tree–stump is transformed into a dragon. Gustave Doré's engraving for E–L. L'Épine's** *La légende de Croquemitaine* **(1863).** [Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library]

The unsuccessful hunt for the the monster of Lake Storsjön, in 1894, was satirised by Albert Engström, in the Swedish magazine *Strix*. **See also the illustration and caption on p142.**

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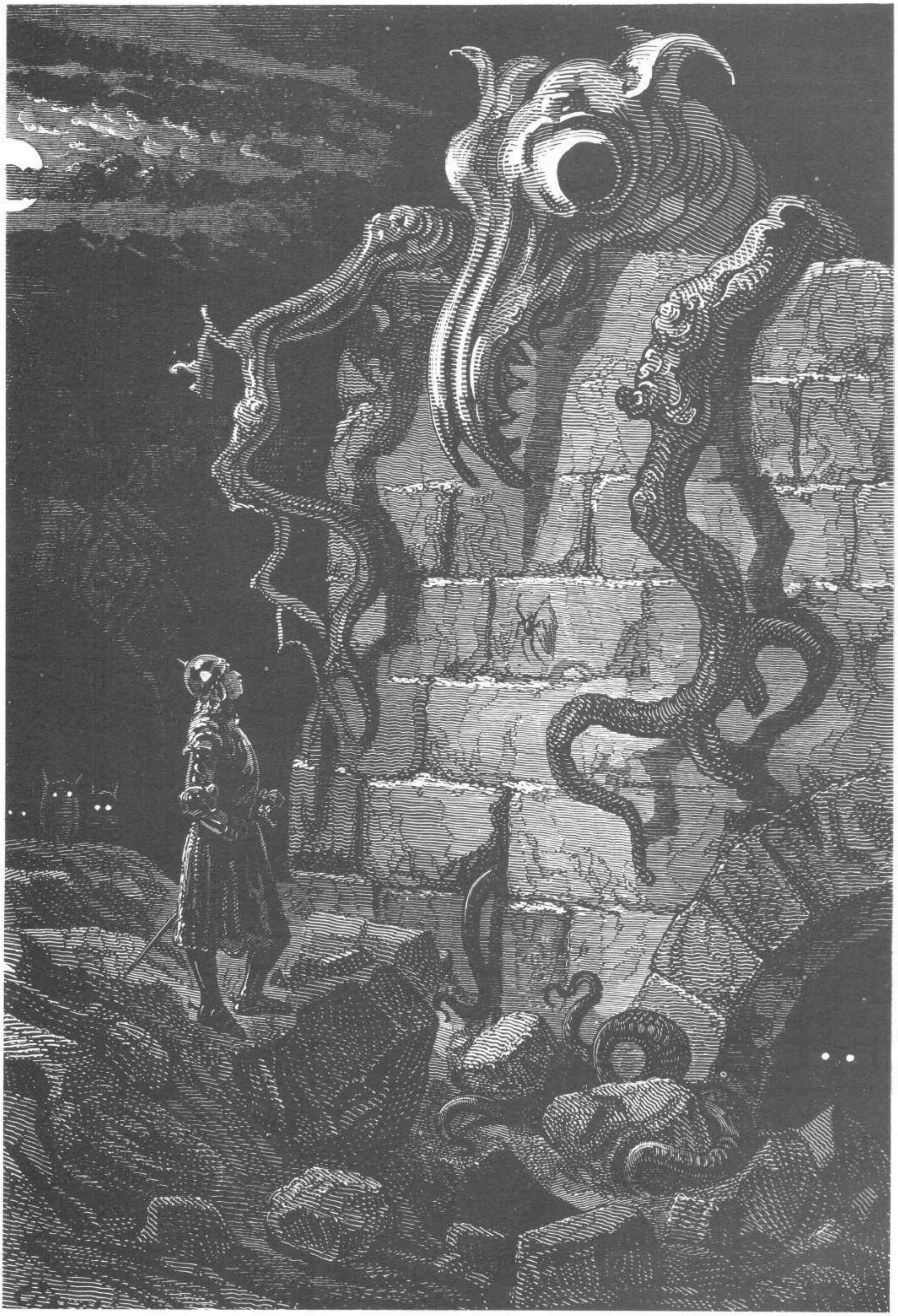
90 ■ One of Hyltén-Cavallius' witnesses was confined to bed "for *three* weeks" as a result of his encounter with a *lindorm*, and recovered "after *three* bleeding holes had opened on his right ankle". Three is a significant *symbolic* number in folklore. Translation: Sven Rosén, 'The dragons of Sweden,' in *Fate magazine*, Illinois, April 1982, p42.

91 ■ Sven Rosén, 'The dragons of Sweden,' in *Fate magazine*, Illinois, April 1982, p44–45.

92 ■ W-E. Peuckert 1942, p31.



reported by Hyltén-Cavallius' witnesses has retained the equine mane and the eyes "red as burning fire" of the traditional lindorm, which also relates it to the monsters of the *Hamar Chronicle* and of Olaus Magnus. At times the Smålanders talk of a "crest" or even of a "dorsal ridge" instead of a traditional "mane" [93], corresponding to the "comb" of the sea-serpent mentioned in some Norwegian legends. [**94**]

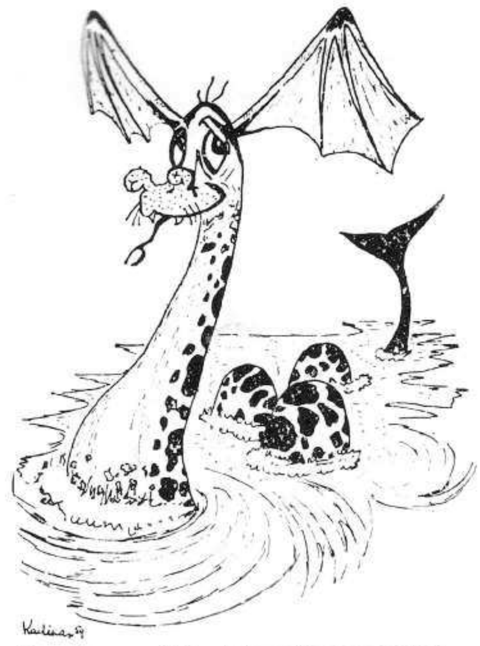
Sven Nilsson, encountering a *lindorm* in a clearing, saw on its head "short protruding ears" [**95**], while Johann-August Burmann described similar appendages. [**96**] Snakes have no ears, but sometimes Scandinavian lake monsters have, like the *Storsjöodjur* of Jämtland. [**97**] The *lindorm* engraved on the powder-horn of Omlied also has recognizable ears, and we recall the "horns" of Bronze Age "horse-serpents", even if a *direct* transmission is unthinkable.

Apart from legendary elements, the modern *lindorm* is conceived as an ordinary grass-snake (*"snok"*) that, when swimming, moves with *horizontal* undulations. [**98**] The *lindorm* of the 19th century has also lost its specific *vertical* windings, attested to for centuries. It is considered a vulnerable beast, and folk-traditions even give the dates (eg. 1878–1883) of killings, including the names of those veritable Sigurds. [**99**] According to Hyltén-Cavallius, "in the Småland Museum, there is a cudgel of curly grained birch, with which Ingemar of Arnanäs, of the Visterad parish, long ago killed a dragon at the Sannaböke glade, in the Stenbrohult parish." [**100**]

But even if a witness asserted that he had killed one of these snakes, he would not be able to produce its remains. Its rapidly decaying carcase produced such an unbearable stench that "the entire forest was made to stink". [**101**] This brings to mind the incredible stench left by the lake monster's remains in the traditional Norwegian stories, as well as the "poisonous stink" of the Mjösa serpent. [**102**]

There is a second interpretation of the *lindorm*, dealing with the supernatural, that is left untreated by Hyltén-Cavallius, because of his zoological preconceptions. He mentions, rather as an example of "simple folk beliefs about those snakes", that "some take them for *ghosts*". [**103**] One case will illustrate this relationship of the *lindorm* to the dead. A young lad, J.A Kronholm, described to Hyltén-Cavallius how he had gone to a *grave-hill*, where stood a stone with a round hole. He noticed "an ordinary viper" and killed it. Immediately, a second one came which he also killed, and so on until a heap of "100 or 120" snakes accumulated. "Finally, in the hole [of the stone] appeared *the head of a dragon*, and the head was as big as a man's wooden shoe." [**104**] This corresponds closely to the sequence at Lake Mjösa in which the swarm of "many little serpents" preceded the appearance of the more enormous maned one.

In Kronholm's statement, as in the *Hamar Chronicle*, the largest specimen would be, according to traditional lore, the 'king' of the snakes, and the mane (or 'comb' in some variants) an attribute of its kingship. [**105**] Therefore the young witness is impersonating the legendary 'snake charmer', killing the subjects of the Serpent King and provoking the awesome coming



A cartoon of the Storsjön monster, by Karl Karlson. From K. Svedjeland, ***Storsjöodjuret*** **(1959).**

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93 ■ G.O Hyltén-Cavallius 1885, p23 & 54.

94 ■ T.Å. Bringsvaerd 1979, p65.

95 ■ G.O Hyltén-Cavallius 1885, p24.

96 ■ *ibidem*, p22.

97 ■ U. Oscarsson 1986; and P. Olsson 1899.

98 ■ G.O Hyltén-Cavallius 1885, p5.

99 ■ *ibidem*.

100 ■ *ibidem*; translation, Sven Rosén, 'The dragons of Sweden,' in *Fate magazine*, Illinois, April 1982, p38.

101 ■ G.O Hyltén-Cavallius 1885, p27.

102 ■ The persistence of this motif is shown by the relation of Father Labat, cited by Pontoppidan from Labat's *Nouveau voyage aux Isles de l'Amérique* (Paris, 1722). Labat's crew had caught a smallish "sea-serpent" and fixed it to their mast overnight. "Next day... it had entirely dissolved into a greenish and stinking liquid...". Translation and full reference in B. Heuvelmans 1968, p105f.

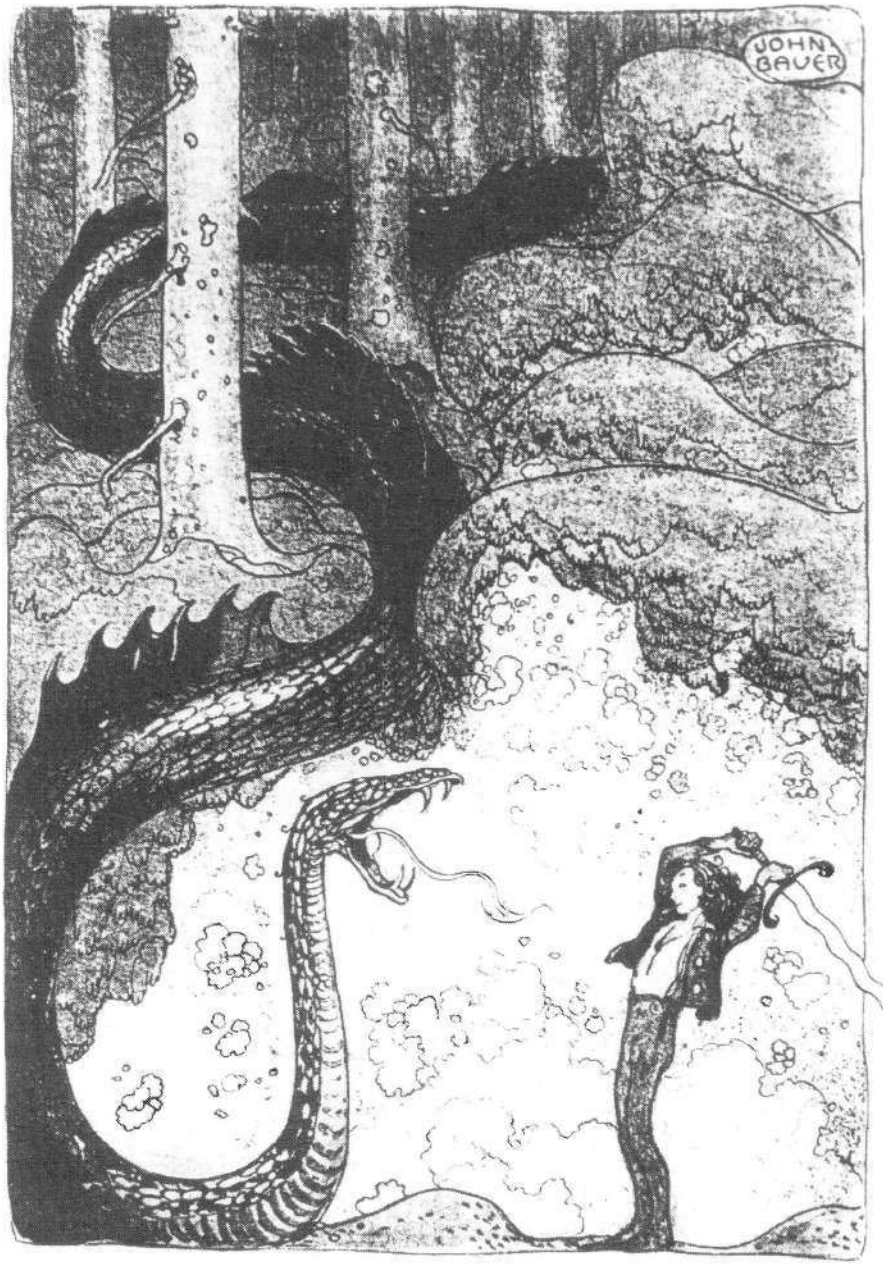
103 ■ G.O Hyltén-Cavallius 1885, p27. See also his p24 for *lindorm* = "devil".

For the funereal aspects of the Great Serpent, see Chapter 2, Sect 10.

104 ■ G.O Hyltén-Cavallius 1885; translation, Sven Rosén, 'The dragons of Sweden,' in *Fate magazine*, Illinois, April 1982, p43.

105 ■ R.T. Christiansen 1958, p48–52.

A battle with a *Lindorm*. A drawing by Swedish artist John Bauer (1882–1978), for Harald Östenson's *Ur Guldslottet* (1911).



of His Reptilian Majesty. Here, the familiar problem is again demonstrated: is the lad relating a *personal vision*, structured by folk-narratives, or is he poking fun at the folklorist? We have no way of knowing.

However, we can consider this a traditional report. According to Sven Rosén: "A traditional interpretation, here, would be to regard the *lindorm* as the guardian of the grave mound." [**106**] Perhaps the monster of Lake Mjösa could be conceived as the guardian of Helgöy Island; Hyltén-Cavallius' naturalistic interpretation, publicized by posters, influenced the content of his interviews. He was thirsting for 'big game' stories, and was given them. His scholarly safari actually modified legends. The folklorist's preconceptions transformed a rich and *complex* legend cycle of dragons, ghosts or marvellous snakes, into a simple zoological oddity.

In essence, Hyltén-Cavallius had mistaken *folklore informants* for *natural history witnesses*. In some ways, the '*systema naturæ*' of the Småland peasants, in 1885, corresponds to that presented to Pontoppidan in the 18th century. Both systems identified *lindorms* as bigger snakes

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106 ■ Sven Rosén, 'The dragons of Sweden,' in *Fate magazine*, Illinois, April 1982, p43.

finding their way into lakes. Many reports in Hyltén-Cavallius' booklet describe the *lindorm* dwelling in moist environments, swimming in lakes (such as Rottnen, Yen and Helga), or sunning on their banks like a big *log*. [**107**] At the popular level, there was no *conceptual difference* between serpents which inhabited the land, lakes or the sea, because all three environments were conceived, as we have seen, as the locations of *different phases of a lindorm's development*.

Hence we can read Europe's history of lake monsters as the gradual differentiation and naturalization of nature spirits and animal ghosts. The process of complete naturalization was not achieved in the Scandinavian folk-culture of the 19th century. Yet there were sufficient elements to allow Hyltén-Cavallius the dream of donating a stuffed *lindorm* to a Stockholm museum. He was searching for an archaic vision, far removed from the modern city, hidden by the foliage and ponds of primitive Småland. He found only his own reflection.

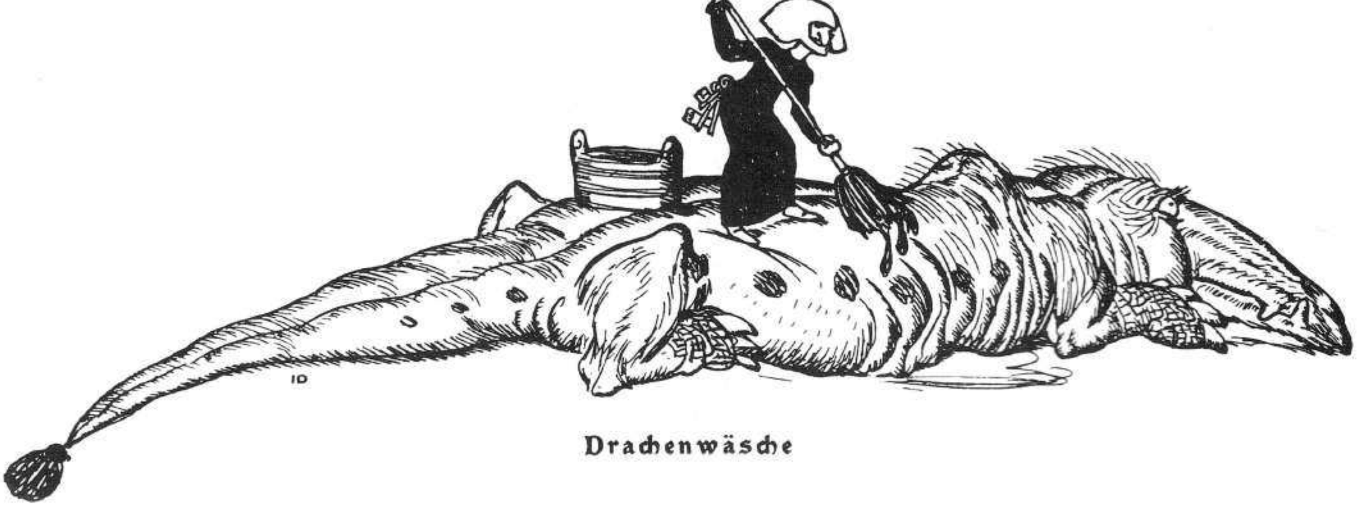
It was necessary to deal with the Scandinavian history of serpentine monsters first, in order to detect and point out the pitfalls that a researcher must avoid if he is to evaluate such complicated and treacherous material. Many a writer has been trapped in a web of illusory facticity. To stay clear of this danger a different approach was needed to deal with the field study in Québec. From the very beginning, I must stress that I do not believe that there exists an autonomous phenomenon in these lakes, be it an unknown animal or an occultist's ghost.

In this study we will deal with the imaginative power of the human mind, combining an objective phenomenology – such as big fish, bizarre waves and floating tree trunks – with a subjective ideology such as that found in legends. Sightings of lake monsters are only one example of this capacity that Austrian anthropologist Hans Biedermann calls "the experience of Irreality" (*"Erlebbarkeit des Irrealen"*). [**108**]

Of primary importance is the ideological input; the objective aspects of sightings are secondary in that they serve only as confirmation of belief. Many more studies will be needed before the mud-caked dragon can reveal its true colour; but this study hopes to be the beginning of a great renovation of the dragon.

Michel Meurger
Paris, June 1987

Washing the dragon. A drawing by Julius Diez, in *Jugend*, N°3 (1902). [Fortean Picture Library]



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107 ■ G.O Hyltén-Cavallius 1885, p5, 9 & 41.

108 ■ See H. Biedermann 1980.

CHAPTER 1

THE ENQUIRY

On going to their working ground one morning, two or three Indians, in advance of the remainder of the party, saw, lying across the path what they took to be the trunk of a tree that had fallen in the night; and they sat upon it, indolently, to wait for the others to come up.

Suddenly, one of them sprang up, exclaiming: "It's alive! I felt it move! It's breathing!" They all jumped up in alarm when the great snake – for snake it proved to be – glided off into the wood. ... and through the underwood, on both sides of the path, was plainly to be seen a sort of small tunnel that had marked the place where the serpent had been lying asleep.

Matava and his fellows, of course, insisted that this was the great "Camoodi", that Indian tradition had long declared existed in this forest set there specially, by the demons of the mountain, to guard it from intrusion.

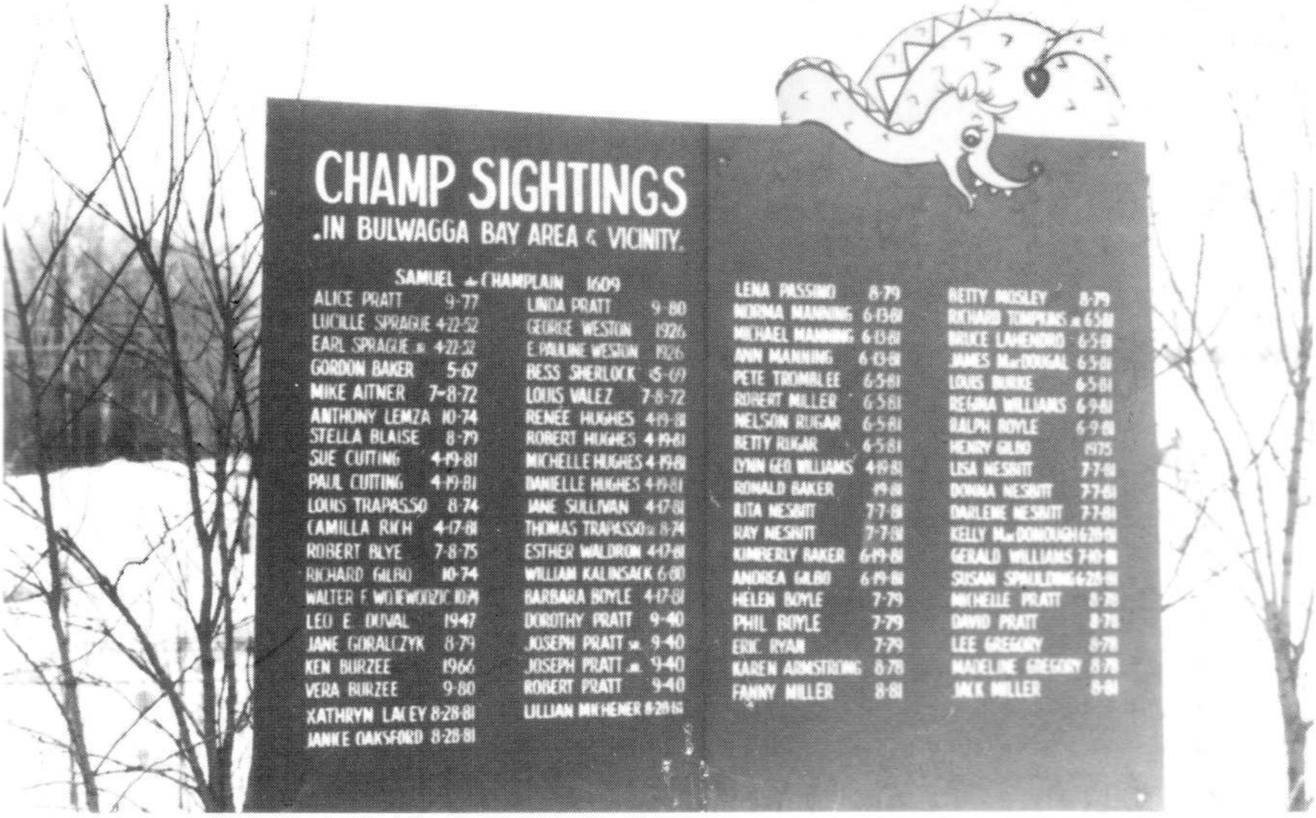
Frank Aubrey,
The devil-tree of Eldorado:
A romance of British Guiana.
1896.

1.1

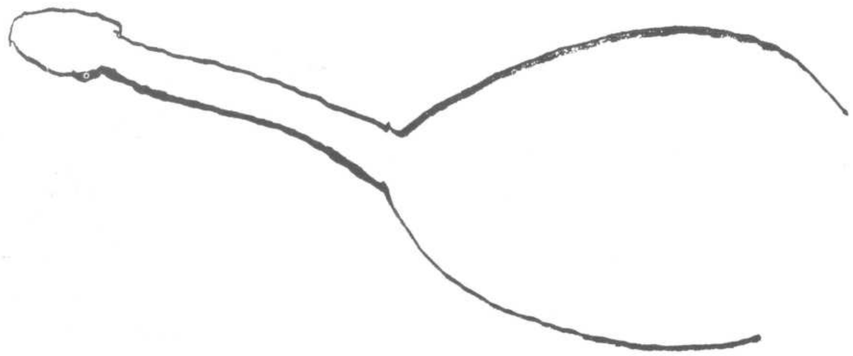
LAKE CHAMPLAIN: CHAMP AND THE T-SHIRTS

In July 1981, the little village of Port Henry, on the banks of Lake Champlain, painted itself in the apple-green colours of "Champ", a pretty Walt-Disneyish dragon. Its image appeared on windows, signposts, T-shirts, and even on buttons. These were artistic interpretations of a monster whose reality is attested to by the impressive series of names painted on a wooden billboard at the entrance to the community. From 1609, when Samuel de Champlain conducted his explorations of the lake, up until observations of just a few weeks ago, the panel proclaims a phenomenon judged by all to be exceptional. But Champlain's alleged sighting is apocryphal – see Appendix 2 – and Champ's modern fame is the product of local monster-enthusiasts in their efforts to promote their own legend along Loch-Nessian lines.

There are even photographs of Champ: the most famous taken by Mrs. Sandra Mansi in July 1977 and first reproduced in the *New York Times* on 30 July 1981. But from the 7th of that same month, local competition was rife. On that day Kelley Williams, then 19 years old, was working at her father's sandwich stand facing the lake, when the dark mass, which the inhabitants of Port Henry had been talking about for weeks, emerged from the calm waters. Miss Williams had time to grab her camera and take four photos.


CHAMP SIGHTINGS
.IN BULWAGGA BAY AREA & VICINITY.
SAMUEL de CHAMPLAIN 1609
ALICE PRATT 9-77
LUCILLE SPRAGUE 4-22-52
EARL SPRAGUE Jr 4-22-52
GORDON BAKER 5-67
MIKE AITNER 7-8-72
ANTHONY LEMZA 10-74
STELLA BLAISE 8-79
SUE CUTTING 4-19-81
PAUL CUTTING 4-19-81
LOUIS TRAPASSO 8-74
CAMILLA RICH 4-17-81
ROBERT BLYE 7-8-75
RICHARD GILBO 10-74
WALTER F WOJEWODZIC 10-79
LEO E. DUVAL 1947
JANE GORALCZYK 8-79
KEN BURZEE 1966
VERA BURZEE 9-80
KATHRYN LACEY 8-28-81
JANICE OAKSFORD 8-28-81
LINDA PRATT 9-80
GEORGE WESTON 1926
E PAULINE WESTON 1926
BESS SHERLOCK 6-5-69
LOUIS VALEZ 7-8-72
RENEE HUGHES 4-19-81
ROBERT HUGHES 4-19-81
MICHELLE HUGHES 4-19-81
DANIELLE HUGHES 4-19-81
JANE SULLIVAN 4-17-81
THOMAS TRAPASSO Jr 8-74
ESTHER WALDRON 4-17-81
WILLIAM KALINSACK 6-80
BARBARA BOYLE 4-17-81
DOROTHY PRATT 9-40
JOSEPH PRATT Sr 9-40
JOSEPH PRATT Jr 9-40
ROBERT PRATT 9-40
LILLIAN MICHENER 8-28-81
LENA PASSINO 8-79
NORMA MANNING 6-13-81
MICHAEL MANNING 6-13-81
ANN MANNING 6-13-81
PETE TROMBLEE 6-5-81
ROBERT MILLER 6-5-81
NELSON RUGAR 6-5-81
BETTY RUGAR 6-5-81
LYNN GEO WILLIAMS 4-19-81
RONALD BAKER 19-81
RITA NESBITT 7-7-81
RAY NESBITT 7-7-81
KIMBERLY BAKER 6-19-81
ANDREA GILBO 6-19-81
HELEN BOYLE 7-79
PHIL BOYLE 7-79
ERIC RYAN 7-79
KAREN ARMSTRONG 8-78
FANNY MILLER 8-81
BETTY MOSLEY 8-79
RICHARD TOMPKINS Jr 6-5-81
BRUCE LAVENDRO 6-5-81
JAMES MacDOUGAL 6-5-81
LOUIS BURKE 6-5-81
REGINA WILLIAMS 6-9-81
RALPH BOYLE 6-9-81
HENRY GILBO 1975
LISA NESBITT 7-7-81
DONNA NESBITT 7-7-81
DARLENE NESBITT 7-7-81
KELLY MacDONOUGH 6-20-81
GERALD WILLIAMS 7-10-81
SUSAN SPAULDING 6-28-81
MICHELLE PRATT 8-78
DAVID PRATT 8-78
LEE GREGORY 8-78
MADELINE GREGORY 8-78
JACK MILLER 8-81

The signboard on the outskirts of Port Henry, New York, which records the names of Champ's witnesses and the dates of their sightings. [Courtesy of Joseph W. Zarzynski ©]



The sketch by Kelley Williams, in my notebook, of the creature she saw in Lake Champlain on 7th July 1981. [Michel Meurger]

This young woman, a likeable redhead, provided us with various interesting details of what she'd seen. Champ's skin appeared to her to be grainy, "like a cucumber"; the colour, "a black and shimmering mass". But it was the enormous size of the thing which particularly held her attention: "larger than two horses together". The general shape, as the young girl drew it on a notebook, was a silhouette which reminded us of a plesiosaurus. Some researchers have suggested that a great saurian might yet survive in lakes like this one. Others, like the cryptozoologist and Loch Ness investigator, Roy Mackal [**1**], see Champ as a *zeuglodon*, a sort of primitive whale. The Loch Ness saga offers a patterning for observations and for theories as well. In any case, the testimonies have piled up. One of the more interesting is that of Charles Mazurowsky who spotted the monster in July 1978: "First, the head appeared, like the head of a horse without ears, then a long neck came from the water; it lasted less than a minute or two". [**2**]

Those who are interested in the history of Champ, like Joseph Zarzynski of Wilton, NY, have assembled a collection of 132 observations, up to the beginning of the 19th century. [**3**] The descriptions of Champ correspond closely to those of other monsters found in the world. Even the texture of his skin, compared to that of a cucumber by the young Williams, finds its parallel in an observation of a monster at the Swedish lake Storsjö, in 1898, whose body was described as "covered in warts". [**4**] Champ, on the model of his Scottish counterpart, is the object of enormous publicity, which has thrust him into the forefront as 'the Loch Ness monster of the United States'.

A Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) team, filming the grey waters of Lake Champlain by helicopter, has transmitted pictures of this enormous, 200 kilometre-long [**5**] lake, as far as the Soviet Union. With this growing celebrity, Kelley Williams' photograph will soon be worth its weight in gold. [**6**] If one is to believe Jeff Danziger, the search for Champ has already become a favourite activity of young people on the lakeside. They track it as far as the swamps, where it sinks its in the flotsam, its heavy body like an island covered with green trunks and slime. [**7**]

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1 ■ Rita Christopher, 'Behemoth from out of the deep', in *MacLean's magazine*, vol.94, N° 28 (13 July 1981).

For discussions of the zeuglodon hypothesis applied to the sea-serpent, see B. Heuvelmans 1965; and R. Mackal 1980, chapter 2.

2 ■ 'Le monstre du lac Champlain', in *La Montagne* (Centre-France), 8 August 1981.

3 ■ Rita Christopher, 'Behemoth from out of the deep', in *MacLean's magazine*, vol.94, N° 28 (13 July 1981).

See also Zarzynski's own book, *Champ: beyond the legend* (Bannister, NY, 1984), and his regular newsletter about current research and reports, *Champ Channels*: PO Box 2134, Wilton, NY 12866, USA.

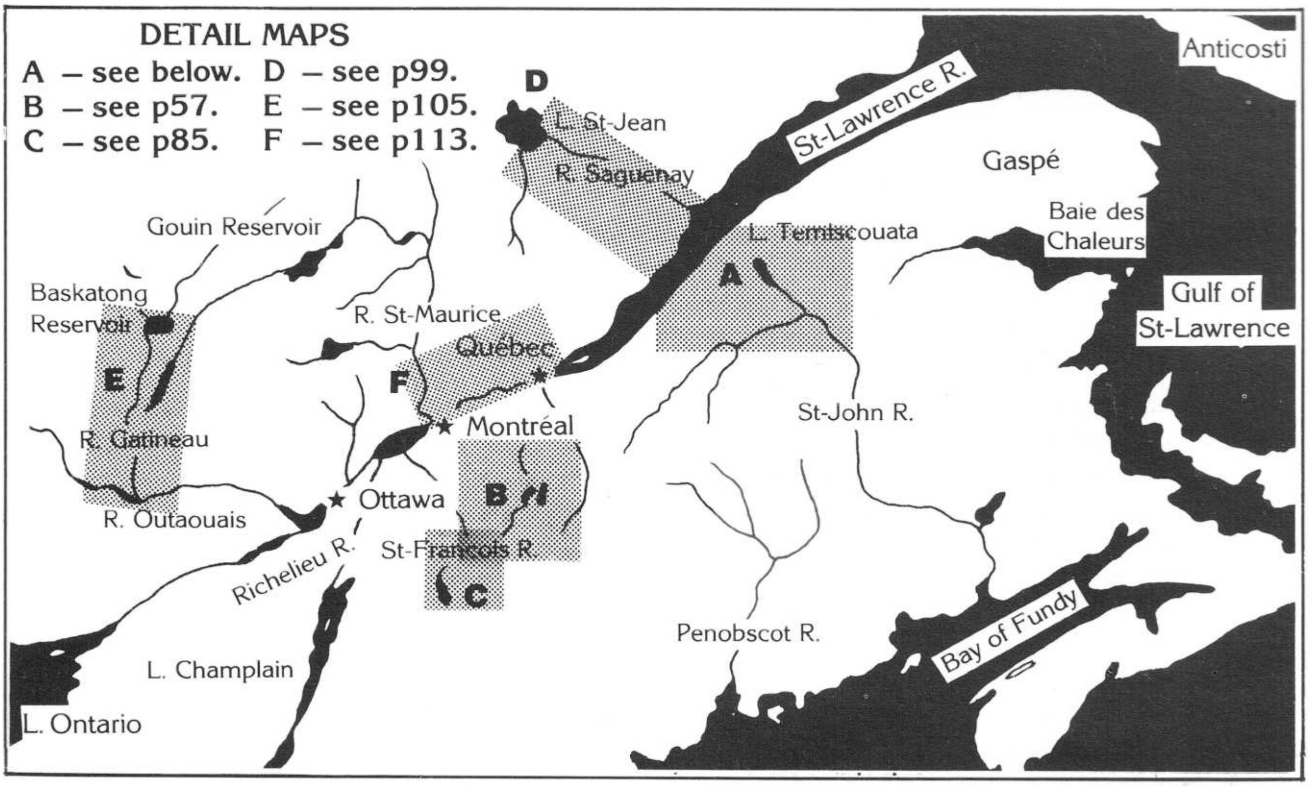
4 ■ P. Costello 1975, p220f. Costello also cites the sighting, in 1933, by Richard Meicklem, who, fort hree minutes through binoculars, watched Nessie's "knobbly and warted hump" (p44f).

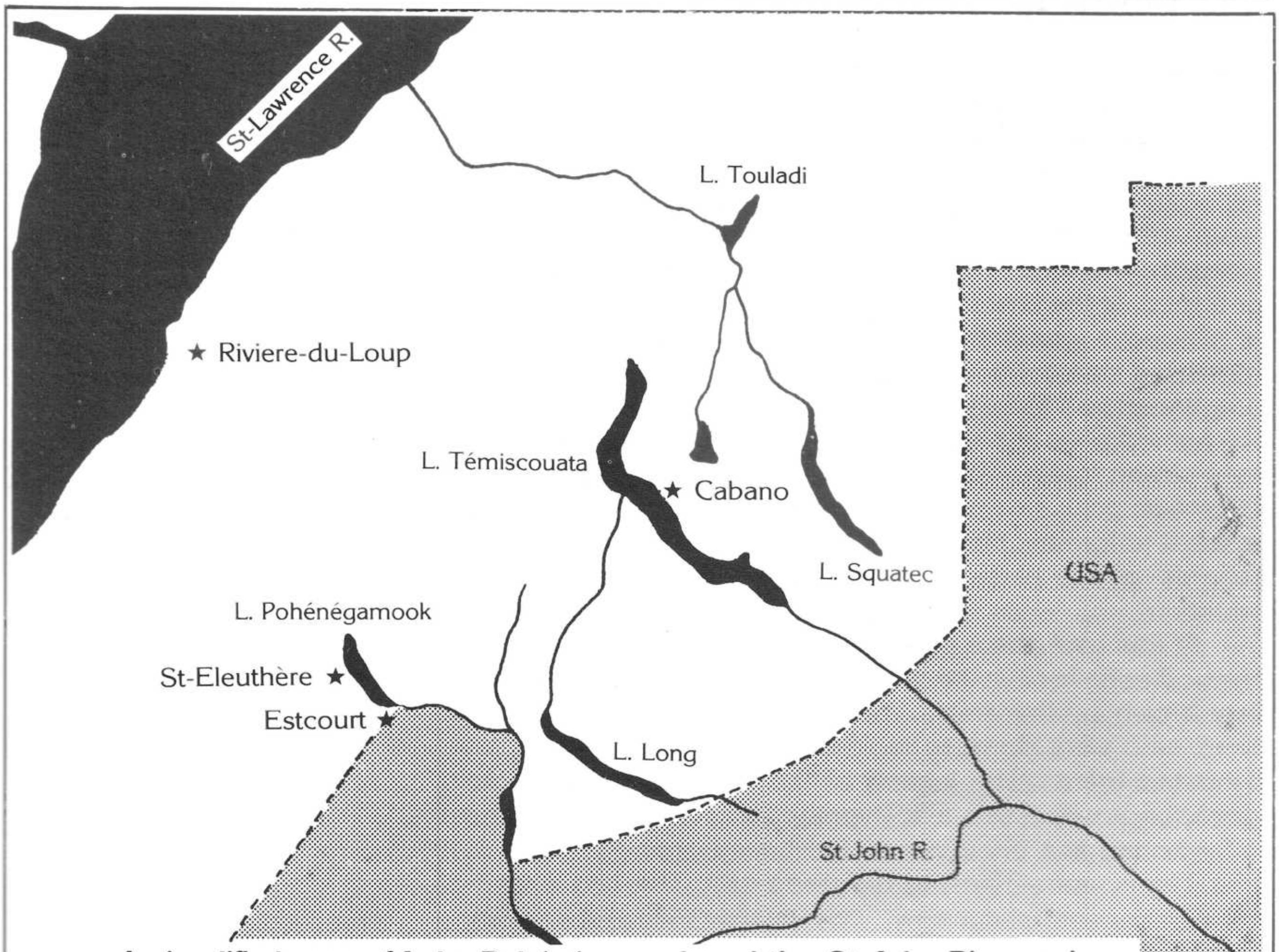
5 ■ 'Move over Nessie, Champ is here,' in *Valley News* 15 July 1981.

6 ■ 'Locals capture Champ on film,' Thousand Island (NY) *Times* 28 July 1981.

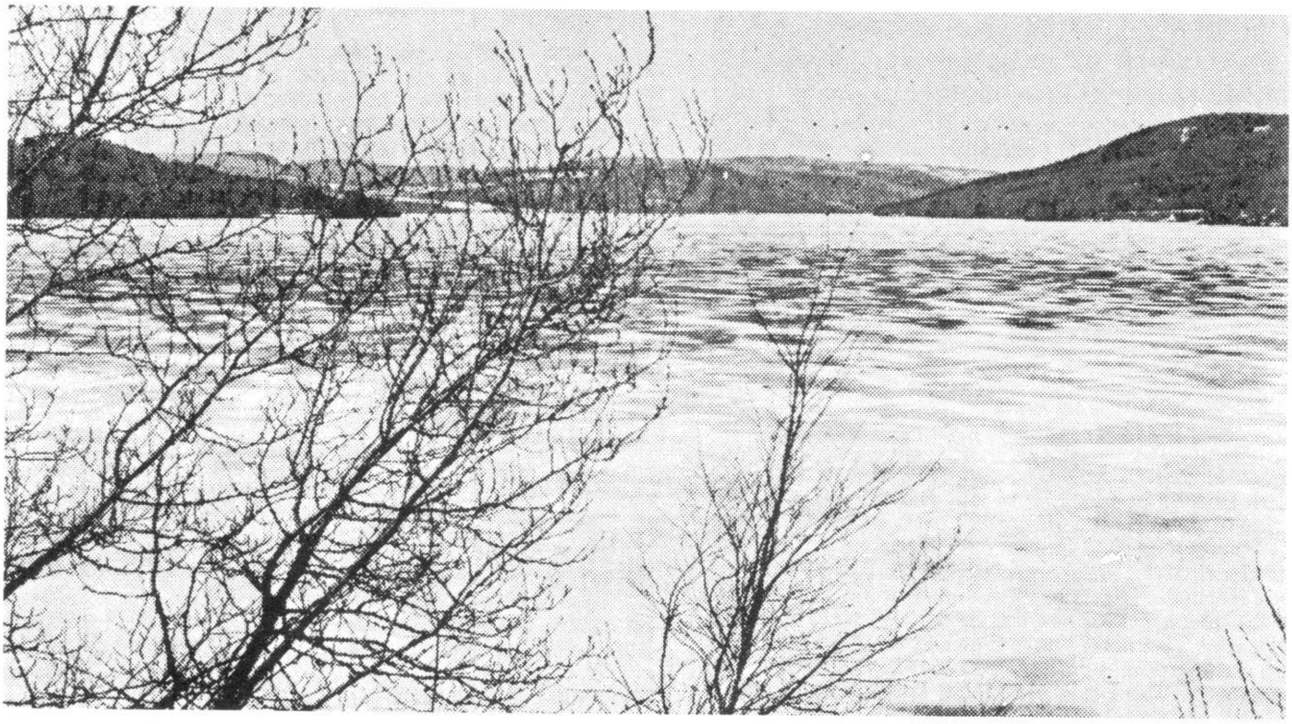
7 ■ J. Danziger 1981.

A simplified map of the St Lawrence Valley, Québec, showing the regions detailed on other pages. NB: For clarity, only the principal lakes, rivers and places mentioned in the text are shown in the maps in this book.


DETAIL MAPS
A – see below.
D – see p99.
B – see p57.
E – see p105.
C – see p85.
F – see p113.
D
L. St-Jean
R. Saguenay
St-Lawrence R.
Anticosti
Gaspé
Baie des Chaleurs
Gulf of St-Lawrence
L. Temiscouata
A
Gouin Reservoir
Baskatong Reservoir
E
R. Gatineau
R. Outaouais
R. St-Maurice
Québec
F
Montréal
Ottawa
B
St-François R.
C
Richelieu R.
L. Champlain
L. Ontario
St-John R.
Penobscot R.
Bay of Fundy


St-Lawrence R.
L. Touladi
Riviere-du-Loup
L. Témiscouata
Cabano
L. Squatec
USA
L. Pohénégamook
St-Eleuthère
Estcourt
L. Long
St John R.

A simplified map of Lake Pohénégamook and the St-John River region.



Lake Pohénégamook.

1.2

LAKE POHENEGAMOOK: THE LOCH NESS OF QUEBEC

The journalistic shock waves caused by Champ have created an echo in the tranquil waters of Québec's Lake Pohénégamook near the border with Maine, USA. The Québec monster, nicknamed *Ponik*, has had the honour of appearing in the press on three occasions: in 1957, 1977, and then in 1980. On the second date, divers from Toronto came to explore the lake, in front of CBC cameras. Fifty witnesses confirmed, at the time, that they had seen Ponik and described his silhouette generally as like an *overturned canoe*, with a crenellated dorsal ridge.

We arrived at Saint-Éleuthère, at the head of the lake, and took our lodgings at a hotel on the waterfront, facing a wild shore covered with forests. Above the hotel loomed the Montagne de la Croix, its peak crowned with an illuminated cross. It is one of the most enigmatic places in the region, and we were told later that this is the place where the "lake enters beneath the mountain".

At this spot, three people were said to have drowned and their bodies have never been recovered from the water, coloured rusty brown by the area's iron-bearing mountains. Deep-sea divers, who went down to look for the body of a child, "were frightened there". The legend of the hollowed-out mountain corresponds with a scientific hypothesis, according to which an underground sea once connected Lake Pohénégamook with Lake Témiscouta, 38km to the north-east. The two lakes behaved like communicating vessels: despite their distance, their water levels varied identically, even during droughts and melting snow.

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1 ■ R-L. Séguin 1971.

It is not at all surprising that this strange, wooded region is associated with monsters. In 1766, according to historian Robert-Lionel Séguin in his work on witchcraft in Québec [1], a werewolf is said to have terrified the population of the near-by village of Kamouraska and its surroundings.

The streets of Saint-Éleuthère are decked-out with banners inviting visitors to the Ponik festival, now a popular celebration. The name "Ponik" is held, by the naive, to be an Amerindian name. In fact, it is a linguistic construction derived from Pohénégamook, in the same way that "Nessie", the Scottish monster of Loch Ness, was named. Ponik was baptised in 1974, at the time of the centenary celebration of the municipality. At Saint-Éleuthère, there is not the same degree of exploitation as there is at Port Henry. We were scarcely able to find a piece of crafted embroidery using the motif of the Québecois monster. Ponik may be on the verge of becoming a tourist attraction, but this is happening discreetly, one might even say, with hesitation.

EYEWITNESSES

Donat Levasseur welcomed us into his home. He placed the first appearances of Ponik in about 1873 to 1874, that is towards the end of the last century. His father, Benoît Levasseur, a pioneer-founder of the parish, "came in a large canoe, transporting his hay. While disembarking he saw something 25–30 feet long plunge twice, and then it was lost in the water." The beast was more recently seen in September 1980, by his wife. It resembled, she said, "a jagged wooden log." More recently still, Ponik had frightened the grandson of one of their neighbours, Gilbert Sirois. This young man, aged 17, was bathing about 60 feet (20m) from the shore when a bubbling passed along his thighs. It felt like "something hot". The thing sucked in water and spurted it forth. The boy was afraid of being caught by it.

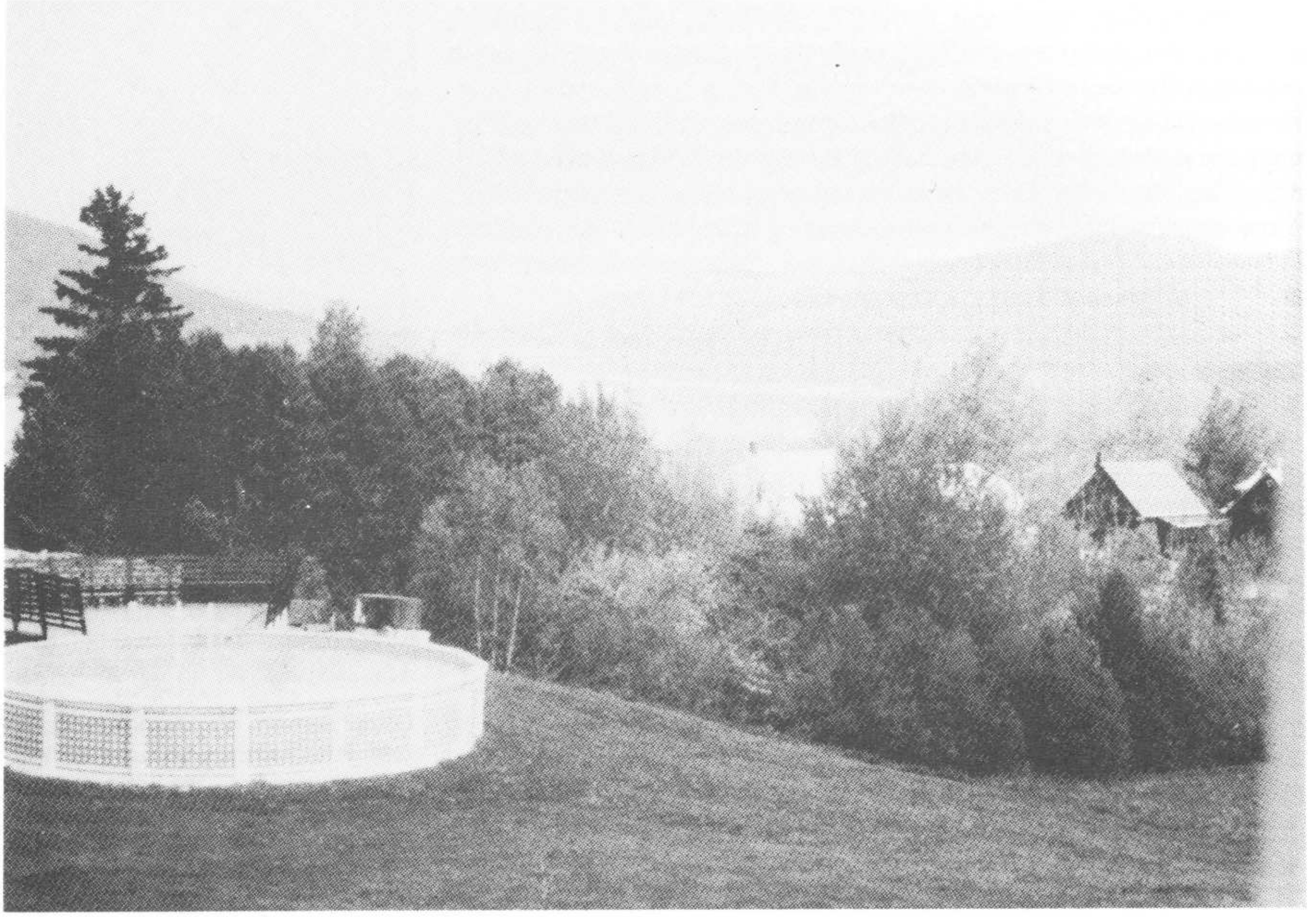
The most recent appearance of Ponik was witnessed by a Redemptionist Father. A monastery of this Order is built on the other side of the lake, in the community of Estcourt. Father Calixte Bérubé recounted to us, very simply, what he had observed while in the company of 15 other persons. "It was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon," he said. "From the path we had a magnificent view of the lake. We saw the back with the dorsal fin. It frolicked like a fish, and shimmered in the sun". Father Bérubé couldn't determine if there had been one or several animals. "It disappeared and reappeared further along; one moment it began to turn around and around as if it were amusing itself. There wasn't time to take photographs. People stopped on the road to watch."

In taking his leave, Father Bérubé gave us the address of Elzéar Sirois, who was nominated by other residents of the area as the one most interested in the beast of the lake, and who had seen it several times. The windows of Mr. Sirois' home open onto the sunny waters. On his lawn, several sculptures executed by the master of the house are dedicated to Ponik. Mr. Sirois, who is 67 years old, came to live at the lake at the age of 14. His father worked in furs and was a *ramancheur* [Québecois = a bonesetter, or practitioner of folk medicine]. His mother was an Irish immigrant. Elzéar introduced himself as a former woodsman and hunter. He had been foreman during the construction of the camping grounds, at Estcourt, by the edge of the forest. Several times a Councillor of the municipality, he was instrumental in the adoption of the name Pohénégamook at the time of the amalgamation of the municipalities of Estcourt and Saint- Éleuthère.

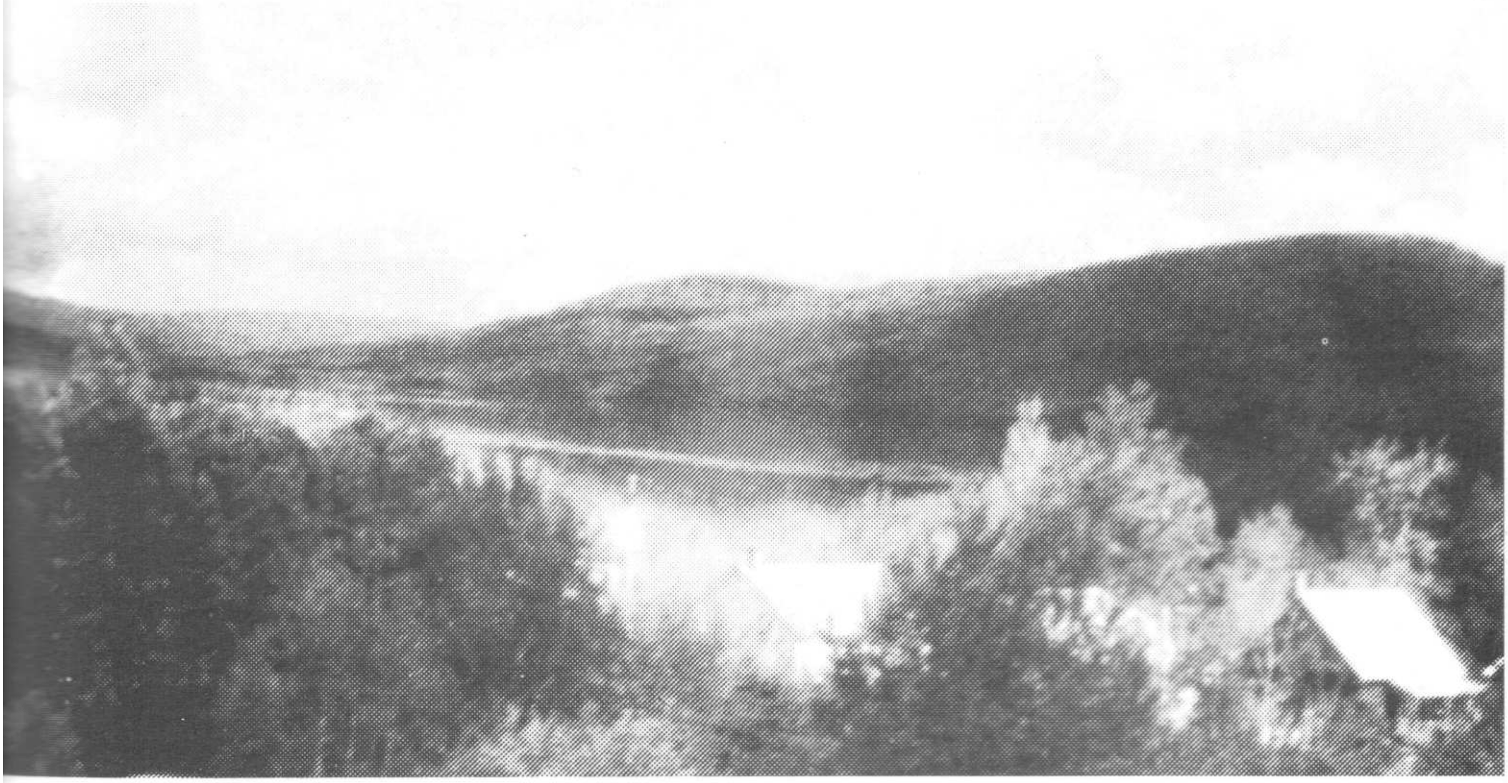
We turned the conversation to the subject of Ponik. He said: "I'm not talking about a monster or a beast, but there is something quite uncanny in the lake; one must not touch anything and certainly not the inky bottom, which sends up clouds when it is disturbed." He remembers that even in his youth old-timers had spoken to him about the monster, around loggers' campfires.

The logger community lives in symbiosis with nature, and teaches its secrets to the young. As Mr. Sirois says: "the forest is a family". It was there that he first heard stories of the monster of the lake from the mouths of his elders. Contrary to popular opinion, "Pohénégamook" doesn't mean "mocking lake" in the language of the American Indian, rather, according to our witnesses, it means "the place of hibernation". It was around this lake that the Abenakis, led by their great chief Grey Owl, spent the winters. "The Indians killed caribou and they gave the meat to the poor whites. The caribou came here in about 1918. The Abenakis camped at the head of the lake and they fished. When they brought up their nets, they were all torn." Elzéar Sirois remembers that the first white to have spoken about the monster was "an old man who has been dead now five years. When he was a boy he saw a rock emerge from the water".

Elzéar Sirois with some of his tree–trunk sculptures. [From *Globe* 15 July 1980.]



Mrs Sylvie Thériault–Lavoie took this view of Lake Pohñégamook at 10:20am on 16th June 1981, when she watched "something moving at a good speed" down the lake, then it was lost to view behing trees. She had seen something similar before, in 1975; a black and grey shape which she watched through binoculars for 2–3 minutes. On neither occasion did she observe a head or tail, or hear the noise of a motor, only the extensive wake of something large on or just below the surface (see enlargement, below). [© S. Thériault–Lavoie.]



In perfect harmony with the daily life of the lakeside dwellers, the monster emerged from the waters during the slack period in the work of land clearing. Mr. Sirois continued: "Louis Bérubé was cutting wood for the winter; he crossed the lake in his boat with two guys, one with double oars and the other with a paddle. He saw enormous bubbles on the surface of the lake. They approached. Waves rose up, as if dolphins were playing in the water. The waves tossed the boat. The thing approached and then it plunged again into the deep."

Even though calm weather seems to offer ideal conditions for observations of the monster, Elzéar Sirois himself saw it during a storm. "Before it disappeared it stayed on the surface for a good while. I could see the black humps, and when the great swells came, it rose against the current." According to him the length of the beast was about 40 feet (12m). Mr. Sirois also furnished us with a description of the head of the animal, all the more interesting as it makes Ponik out to be an amphibian.

Mrs. Alcide Desbiens, who resides near the famous place where the lake "enters underground", saw, from her terrace, what she took to be "a horse, lying in the water, on the shore". Intrigued by this curiously "mutilated horse" [2] she spoke about it to her husband, who, with binoculars, had a good view of the beast, which was still stretched out by the shore. "There was coarse hair along its neck, a cow's head without ears. The body was both in the water and on the shore".

Louis Bérubé, pioneer lumberjack and 19th century witness of the Pohńégamook monster, has assumed legendary status himself, often described as a 7ft-tall giant. From *Chicago Tribune Magazine* 1 June 1980.

Many hunters have tried to attack the monster from their canoes, without success. One local celebrity even tried to take this leviathan with a fish line and hook. Mr. Sirois continued: "Noë Ducharme (the lumber boss, with his fingers covered with rings) tried to shoot Ponik and regretted it. That was before 1914. Then he tried to make an anchor. A blacksmith hammered out the large hooks for him. With this anchor baited with meat and cheese, he tried to catch the monster. Every morning the bait was gone, eaten." [3]

These are the crucial interviews we conducted around this lake concerning the fugitive monster which disappears "like a submarine" when the curious approach too closely. In his book on the centenary of the town, written in 1974, Guy Théberge noted that the beast had been seen by Alex Bélanger in about 1900. [4] This would make a series of modern testimonies spanning 80 years, the most recent being that of Father Bérubé.

The rationalistic phase of the Ponik affair began in July 1957, after Mayor Gaston Painchaud appealed to the Québec minister responsible for hunting and fishing. The Mayor had been sceptical at first, but after he was privileged to see Ponik for himself, he called immediately for an official investigation. From mid-July to the autumn of 1957, two researchers from the Ministry – Professor Vadim D. Vladykov and a Mr. Shields – interrogated witnesses and explored beyond the shores of the lake. Their report [5], according to newspapers, was favourable to the existence of "a creature of great dimensions" in the lake. Indifferent to the verdict of the Québec functionaries, Ponik continued to surface in the dark waters flouting divers, television cameras, and the rumour which grew around its refuge.

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[2] ■ *"cheval estropié"*, because Mrs Desbiens, who could not see all of the creature.

[3] ■ In reality, after a discussion with Ducharme's son, I [M.M.] heard that the bait was *not eaten*, but that the line itself had been carried away by the lake currents. Surely this is an example of the folklorization of a real occurrence.

[4] ■ G. Théberge 1974.

[5] ■ We have not been able to get a copy of this report, which probably disappeared during the course of the "Quiet Revolution" of the 1960s, in which changes in administrative methods made a *tabula rasa* of most of the records of the past which did not have a legislative or judicial character.

AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR VLADYKOV

Since his investigation in 1957, Professor Vadim Vladykov has become *the* scientific reference concerning the phenomenon of Pohénégamook. Investigators of the Loch Ness monster do not hesitate to write to him from Scotland. He has become the name on which journalists hang their own speculations and gossip. It has been said and written that "for one month Professor Vladykov dragged the lake with a net", that he travelled so much on Lake Pohénégamook "that the motor of his boat caught fire", and that he believed "in the existence of a creature of great size in the waters".

We wanted to check what truth there was in this, and applied for an interview with Professor Vladykov, who accorded it to us with great courtesy. Vladykov, a retired professor of biology from the University of Ottawa, received us in his office, its shelves piled high with journals and books. He related to us the essentials of his mission at Pohénégamook with a roguish smile, which didn't leave his face during the entire meeting.

"In 1957, following intervention of the county deputy, Minister Pouliot called for me and told me that people were afraid to swim in the lake because of rumours of the existence of a monster. I accepted the charge of the investigation. I interviewed seven or eight persons in different places. One man had seen something rocking on the lake, another was afraid to go into the water at the place where he had seen something. A duck hunter had left his dog in the canoe and the animal started to bark loudly to warn his master of a "*crocodile*". **[6]**

"The reports were unanimous", confirmed the professor. "The form resembled that of an overturned canoe with two pairs of pectoral and ventral fins. Nobody had seen the head. People spoke of the size as 18 feet (5.5m) in length.

"Following these interviews, I was convinced that there was something in the lake. As there was a falling-off of about half a mile in the middle of the lake, I proposed to install a net, but this was not done. The so-called fire of the engine in my boat is a fable. The fact that no one had ever seen the head of the animal allowed me to suppose that it must be a fish. A seal, suggested by certain people as an explanation, would have shown its head.

"Among fish, the *sturgeon* seem to me to be the most likely. Normally lake sturgeon can grow to be 8 feet (2.44m), and the sea-going black sturgeon can be *as long as 14 feet (4.27m)*. A black sturgeon, 14 feet long, was caught in New Brunswick in 1924, and the Saint-Jean River system flowing to New Brunswick, before it was dammed, could have allowed an enormous fish to come to Pohénégamook. A lenght of 14-feet length is rare; so 18 feet (5.5m) for a sturgeon is, nonetheless, possible. The jagged bottom of an upturned canoe, that people see, corresponds to the jagged ridge on the sturgeon's back. The resemblance is completed by the white and black parts of the body of this fish, which remind people of a boat. Therefore, this could be a sturgeon which had come from the sea to spawn in fresh water by way of the Saint–Jean River. Sturgeon can live up to 50 or 55 years of age. What brought me to this hypothesis was the testimony of the old Abbé whom I met. He was a fish lover and had bought sturgeon. One day he lost one, a very long sturgeon, in the lake. According to the date and length, this could have been the same one. In any case, I told the Minister to inform people that there was no danger for the public because there is no danger in swimming near sturgeon."

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[6] ■ Much more material on the subject of out-of-place crocodiles, etc. will be presented in a forthcoming book. [M.M.]

For crocodilian tales from Lake Memphrémagog see Appendix 3.

A 352lb black sturgeon caught at Kamouraska, on the St-Lawrence, in June 1954, by Maurice Ouellet (pictured); from V. Vladykov, *Les esturgeons: poissons du Québec* **(1955).** [© Department of Fisheries, Québec.]

This then is the truth of Professor Vladykov's position. His famous report, on which so many fables had grown, was no more than a page long. We learned that, when studying monsters, it is not surprising that even the reports on them take on colossal dimensions. Though his learned remarks, which were tinged with humour, appeared respectable and sympathetic to us, his hypothesis appeared to be partial. We were able to get him to agree that Ponik had shown itself to the pioneer-founders of the parish, well before the cleric had lost his sturgeon, and that the Indians themselves, according to tradition, had a problem with the monster long before that time.

The hypothesis of the sturgeon, like all other hypotheses referring to known animals, resolves only *a part* of the problem when it takes into account only *a part* of the observations. It is this partiality which causes those eyewitnesses from Estcourt, whom we questioned, to reject his hypothesis. These people, typically inveterate fishermen, know the backs of the different fish. We can say that the shape of the "overturned canoe" cannot be mistaken for the back of a sturgeon. This bizarre "canoe" of Pohénégamook was said to have a jagged edge sometimes, and at other times a smooth skin.

From monster-haunted lakes all over the world, from Scotland to Canada, the silhouette of the overturned canoe appears in conjunction with other descriptions: the body of a serpent, the silhouette of a seal, the humped mass, etc. The supposed absence of a head is often mentioned in such accounts, but not always. Thus, in the case of Ponik, Mrs. Desbiens saw a "cow's head without ears", as did Mrs. Tardif. [**7**] In the course of inquiries, people did compare certain aspects of the lake monsters, in some ways, with sturgeon, especially when viewed from afar. But the same witnesses who make this comparison see six or seven fins on the "sturgeon's" back, which does not correspond at all to the well known form of this fish. We will see equally that reports of these strange "sturgeons" keep company with the "quasi-serpents", "quasi-logs" and the "quasi-seal" .

Professor Vladykov's hypothesis demonstrates that, in choosing certain testimonies, and even certain elements of the testimony, one can start with the unknown and arrive at the known. But this known entity is only a shadow of the reality. In the course of our interview with him, the value of the scientific principle, which is mandatory for this sort of investigation, was made clear to us: "One must be sceptical; anything is possible."

LAKE MASKINONGE: WHAT IS A MONSTER?

We should define what we understand by the word "monster". It is what we call a living being which is not necessarily malformed in relation to the laws of nature, but which is not normally a part of our understanding of the natural world. As we will show in the beginning of section 4 of this chapter, a simple pike can become a monster if its size surpasses the usual proportion of pikes in a given lake. A pike of around 67lbs (30kg) becomes a monster in a lake which is

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[7] ■ Discussed in greater detail at Chapter 4, p224ff.

33 feet (10 m) deep; a *maskinongé* [**8**] of, say, five foot six inches (1.75m) long becomes a monster, even for the professional fishermen of Lake Maskinongé.

In 1981, *Sentier* magazine published a report on a fishing expedition on Lake Maskinongé, not far from the village of Saint-Gabriel de Brandon. [**9**] We visited the lake, and the people living on its shores, in order to know the exact extent of reports of lake monsters.

The morphological aspects first. The lake is dark and the average depth is about 82 feet (25m). However, according to Roger Doire, an amateur fisherman who lives by the shore, things become complicated at the lower depths. One of his friends did a sounding of the lake and reported that at certain places the sonar could find nothing. "At least 100 feet (30m)," said Mr. Doire, "the lake-bottom probably becomes cavernous. This would explain the presence of many false currents in the lake." According to this witness, it is difficult to verify the exact depth of the underwater crevices and caverns, given the almost total darkness at any point deeper than 39 feet (12 m). He added that the divers who have gone down have been frightened by the size of the fish that they met.

If these caverns exist and connect at the bottom, it would explain, according to Mr. Doire, why the lake does not give up its drowned. At times even boats are said to disappear. The sunken boats and drowned bodies would be sucked in by the currents at the bottom. [**10**]

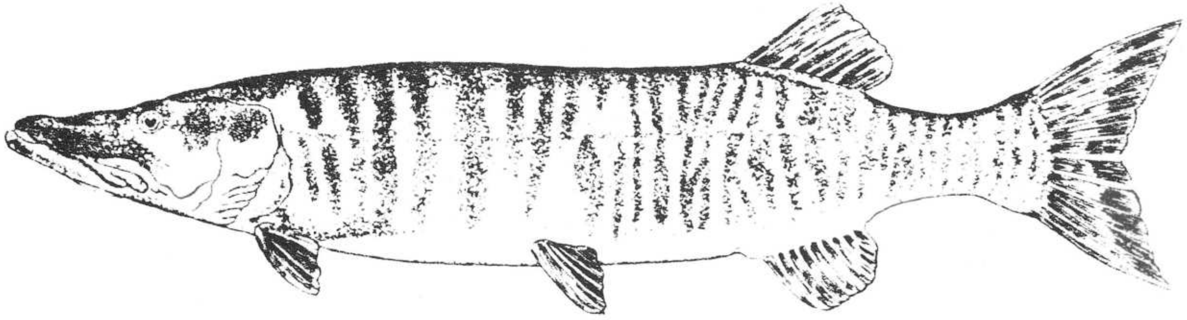
Another inhabitant of the lakeshore, an elder of the area and wife of an amateur fisherman, confirmed the rumour concerning the exceptional size of the fish in the lake. The lake's influence is ever-present for those living on its shores. When typhoid fever attacked the local population several years ago, certain people believed that it was caused by the lake waters. This was never proven either one way or the other. It must be added that, even though there is no developed natural park or sporting grounds, there are two camp sites, and tourism flourishes there.

The hypothesis – for the moment unverifiable – of grottoes at the bottom of the lake, which cause strange currents of water, was voiced by a native of Saint-Damien, Léo Dénomemée. He is as fascinated as the other inhabitants by the exceptional size of the fish in the lake, and includes in his account mention of the terrified divers. With doubtless sincerity, he tells of a *maskinongé* of 33 pounds (15kg), caught by his neighbour, in this lake, which has a perimeter of only 8 miles (12 km). The accounts of fishing in *Sentier*, tell, with text and photographs, of a *maskinongé* of around 26½ pounds (12kg), and about 60 inches (almost 1.5m) long. Mr. Doire also told us of a man who saw a fish on the surface of the lake as long and as large as his boat. "Fishermen's stories!" people might protest. But one thing is certain; the photograph, often touted by the incredulous, shows that there's a greater likelihood of making a catch of enormous size in this lake, and the statement by fishing expert Paul Demchuck is valid: "There are still veritable monsters swimming in Lake Maskinongé." The fishermen of every lake know that it is nearly impossible to catch the largest fish. The

8 ■ Maskinongé – *Esox muskinongy mitchill* – a kind of North American pike, also known as *muskellonge*. We will use the name by which the fish is more familiarly known throughout Québec.

9 ■ J.B.S. Huard, 'Les monstres du lac Maskinongé,' in *Sentier, the magazine of hunting and fishing in Québec*, September 1981.

10 ■ Mrs Lise Masse, secretary of the Lake Maskinongé Fishing Club, told Jean-Guy Pinel about the local traditions of a "subterranean river" secretly uniting the lake with *"Lac Noir"* (Black Lake). The opening of this cryptic river is revealed, so says the legend, by a strong eddy which sucks down the bodies of those drowned in Lake Maskinongé never to reappear. (See: J-G Pinel, 'Des poissons si gros qu'ils font peur' (Monstres du Lac Maskinongé)', in *Echo de Louiseville*, 26 May 1982, p18.



The maskinongé, muskellonge, or muskie – (*Esox masquinongy mitchill*) – a kind of North American pike.

largest eat the smallest, and the size of a fish is proportional to its distance from the surface. Such a lake as Maskinongé, with the catches that it offers and the abysses which it seems to harbour, can only inspire fishermen to dream. The likes of Paul Demchuck will not rest until they have caught another, even bigger, fish at the end of their lines.

These red *maskinongé* might be said to resemble timber-logs [*"pitounes"*] 4 feet long, floating in the currents, and thus might be identified with the "great chopping-logs" [*"billots"*] of which many fishermen have spoken. But the "great log" has been found in other lakes also, in which there are no *maskinongé*. In this we see the unknown (the curious log-shape) reduced to the known (the *maskinongé*); we hesitate to make the same association. (Timber-logs are usually reddish and just under four feet (1.2m) long; while chopping-logs are black and nearly 12 feet (3.6m) long.) The explanation of the *maskinongé* is not valid for the larger chopping-log-sized creatures.

These big chopping-logs, as they're called by the fishermen, do not cover the entire domain of the monstrous at Lake Maskinongé. The psychology of the monstrous goes beyond the moment when the fisherman's line is suddenly broken. This lake, which produces enormous fish and which consumes the drowned, shows the fascination which the environment works on the shore-dwellers. The habit of describing the lake's fish with the adjective "monstrous" refers not only to the enormous size of the catch, but also to the mystery surrounding the exact nature of the bottom of the lake. The word expresses how the least abnormality in nature can fascinate or frighten man. The ravaging of the fishermen and the fear of the diver – all of these can become the ingredients of legends.

Over the years, the many catches on the shores of Lake Maskinongé have fed the imagination. At the very least, the caverns of the lake are held to shelter "creatures which evade capture". A local resident, Mrs. Gérard Doyle, recounted her memory of stories about the monster from a long time ago. Other residents make bitter jokes about the monsters of the lake. ("There's a monster in the lake! What, only one?") Does the passer-by take the stories of the fish seriously? Does he truly believe that there is something other than *maskinongé* in the grottoes of the unfathomable depths? It is impossible to know.

There are probably not plesiosaurs here, but the lake harbours the "monster", and the word expresses the wonder mixed with fear felt by those who come to this lake. "Monstrous" qualifies not only the animals but also the lakes themselves. Especially as these lakes abound with the enigmas of their depths. For some tens of kilometres around, the stories of these fabulous events and their mysterious origins are recounted. It is perhaps only the drowned who know the answers, and they do not speak.

1.3

LAKE REMI: MINI-LAKE AND MICRO-MONSTER

The 'monster' paradigm can be removed from its particular material context without losing its basic structure. At Lake Rémi, in the county of Argenteuil, there is a rumour of a monster which is very popular at a local hotel. It concerns a pike, but because Lake Rémi is quite small – it measures about 984 feet long by 492 feet wide (300m by 150m) – the story is not a simple one. Pike are fished for here; the fish come from Lake Brochet by a small stream, some 14½ feet (4.5m) wide. It is at this small passage that the rumour of the monster has taken hold.

It is said that in Lake Rémi there is an enormous pike which breaks lines and cannot be caught; it is believed to weigh more than 220 pounds (100kg) and measure about 6½ feet (2m). "Ridiculous!" say some of the fishermen. "I've seen it," add others. The question of the reality of this monster is uppermost. "Monstrous" signifies first of all "out of proportion" in the natural order of things. A six foot pike in a small lake engenders the same type of debate between the inhabitants as a plesiosaur would do in a much deeper lake. One sees the same kind of problems of credibility and experience develop at another level. Serge-André Crête, an anthropologist specialising in the prehistory of Québec, told us that every lake in Québec has its monster rumours. He includes, to be sure, the cases of simple 'fishermen's stories' with the examples of the small Lake Rémi and the average-sized Lake Maskinongé near Saint-Gabriel de Brandon.

We have all heard 'fishy stories', telling of the enormous catch which got away before witnesses could verify it. There is an anthropological phenomenon in this kind of story which must be pointed out: the false 'fisherman's story' is only made possible by the true fisherman's story. The false representation of something is only made possible by the real manifestation of that thing. The exaggerating stories, in order to be credible, must respect the limits of the true events experienced by others. In the 'fisherman's story' we can see the pre-scientific observation of nature by man. The man who hunts or fishes, like the man who climbs mountains, or who simply travels, comes at some point to the limit of his known world. An expert fisherman, telling of his adventures, of wild landscapes that he has seen, can fascinate us. How easily could he, in recounting his memories, lead us into fiction with the aid of what he has learned in his adventures. The story of *Jaws*, a shark of about 23 feet (7m), emerges from the same fantasy: a fish too large for its surroundings; excess which draws back the limits of experience. Whoever lives through such an encounter returns from it with a story of a pike, a *maskinongé*, a plesiosaurus; they are equivalent.

The structure is identical. This and nothing else is what we understand by "monster". It is an animal of excess size which is beyond the verification of normal experience. Man does not like to be overwhelmed by experience and limited by it. This is why he does not believe that his neighbour can have exceeded this limit, and so he reduces the mystery of the froth on the lake to the fizz of beer.

Aurèle Moussin, an experienced fisherman at Lake Rémi, dreams of catching the giant pike. According to testimonies from people present in his grocery store, 7% of the lakeside population have come in contact with the enormity of this supposed pike. 10% of those who have not seen it, believe in it, with evidence. However, 20% of the population still don't believe in it. What is needed in order for people to believe in the possibility that a 220-pound pike is trapped in the small lake, which is only 30 feet (9.1m) deep (except in one place)? The incredulity here is the same phenomenon as that encountered at Loch Ness and at Pohénégamook. We have questioned the residents of Lake Rémi who don't believe in the enormous fish. Their state of mind is the same as those of the incredulous residents of Lake Aylmer and Lake Williams. Behind a total lack of argument there is always the reflex of a doubting Thomas: "I have to see it to believe it".

The judgement of Mr. Moussin is, however, as nuanced as that of Mr. Sirois. There are large fish in all the lakes: the largest are at the bottom, and never or rarely come to the surface. Nobody can believe that they've caught the largest fish in the lake. If there are three pikes of 100 pounds in a lake, perhaps there is one which is even larger. This series of deductions is completely logical and takes into consideration the conditions of possible experience. And the limit of experience, to return to the words of Mr. Moussin, is "the line which breaks". There is nothing more to add.

But the experienced fisherman has the right, all the same, to ask what could have broken his line of 50 TS in a lake where it is not deemed possible to have fish of more than five pounds, or exceptionally, possibly ten pounds. An inhabitant of the shores of the Rouge River, residing in the village of Labelle, in the county of Argenteuil, tells us with unextinguished wonder that many years ago, on the feast of John the Baptist (24 June), a young boy caught a 22-pound pike, which was considered the event of the day. How many stories like that are there? Thousands. And how many stories like the next one? Still in the county of Argenteuil, near the village of Boileau, on the medium sized lake called Commanda – 54½ feet (16 m) deep in places – a father and his family saw, fleeing from the bank, a tortoise, whose size was about 8 times the normal size reported in the region. Who can assure us that we know every animal which inhabits our forests and our lakes?

No naturalist would pretend that this ancient encyclopedic dream of cataloguing every living creature has been realized. The development of our science is still embryonic and founded on ignorance. We barely know our natural satellites; we know almost nothing about other planets in our little solar system, practically nothing of the galaxies. In the same way, we know very little about our earth's crust and the bottom of our seas.

The enterprise of Commander Cousteau shows precisely that we are still in the pre-history of our knowledge of our biological reality. We have not climbed all the mountains, we have not explored all the caves – we cannot even see, with the instruments we have now, the bottoms of many of our lakes. Dare we reject that which might contradict our prejudices concerning nature?

"The broken line" of Mr. Moussin; the torn nets of the Amerindians; the fear of the diver in the darkness below 39½ feet (12m); the impossibility of emptying the lake; the impossibility of placing a submarine in a lake by helicopter, as is done in the comic strips; these are the real limits of our experience. What is more, our experience in observation can be modified by phenomena of another order: illusions, hallucinations, simulations. Even here we don't know everything: "A fish always appears larger in water than out of it".

LAKE SIMON: A RIVAL TO "JAWS"

In the course of our investigation we have been led to different experiences. While investigating a monster rumoured to inhabit Lake Simon, in the county of Portneuf, we arrived at the site and were able to visit a beautiful vacation colony for the young, managed by a community of Brothers of Mary the Immaculate. A few words with the colony's Superior allowed us to understand the origin of the story, which concerned a "white shark" said to be sleeping at the bottom of the lake. The monitors in charge of the colony had used the possibility of re-awakening the 'monster' as a sort of deterrent, hoping the prohibition of swimming would encourage the young to pursue their other daily activities.

We had a good laugh. But we found it doubly interesting to realise that not only journalists create April-Fool-type hoaxes, but that others may be doing so for a variety of reasons. The argument which frightened the young people touched on a popular psychological concern as to what might be at the bottom of the lake. Secondly, we'd learned of this rumour by way of an intermediary, a remark made by a garage attendant to an environmental inspector: by word of mouth.

A rumour can propagate more easily if it is conducted in a receptive psychological context. Where does the receptivity to such a rumour among the shore-dwellers of Lake Rémi come from, if it is not from their own ideas of nature?

LAKE PLACID: CHAMP STRIKES BACK

We picked up a rumour of a monster in Lake Placid, in the State of New York. At the site, we were quickly able to identify the element which had given rise to the belief. It was a recent book about the monster of Lake Champlain [1], which had appeared on the counters of bookstores in the municipalities on the shores of the lake. In these bookstores we were able to gather, additionally, an opinion on this famous Champ. In his *Adirondack Album* [2], Barney Fowler asserts that this 20–30-foot long creature, in Lake Champlain, is a sturgeon, and that what Samuel de Champlain must have seen, in 1609, was a gar-pike. [3] Finally, Fowler mentions the fabrication of a mechanical monster in Lake George, also in New York State. This robot illustrates the fascination of Canada's southern neighbours, and their capacity to create totems out of technical gadgets.

All of the inhabitants of the shores of Lake Placid whom we questioned were unanimous in denying the existence of the rumour of the monster in their lake. But all of them knew about Champ, and several asked us what they should think about what was going on at Lake Champlain. The popularity of Champ grew before our eyes. It had invaded the minds and the bookstores of the surrounding lakes, and was consolidating. It is altogether accidental that on the shores of Lake Placid we met two young travellers who came from Saguenay, in Québec, and who spoke to us, for the first time, of the monster of Lake Saint-Jean. [4]

1 ■ J. Danziger 1981.

2 ■ B. Fowler 1980, vol.2, p12.

3 ■ In our Appendix 2 we give Champlain's full text, which is often alluded to and never, to our knowledge, cited accurately.

4 ■ See p98ff.

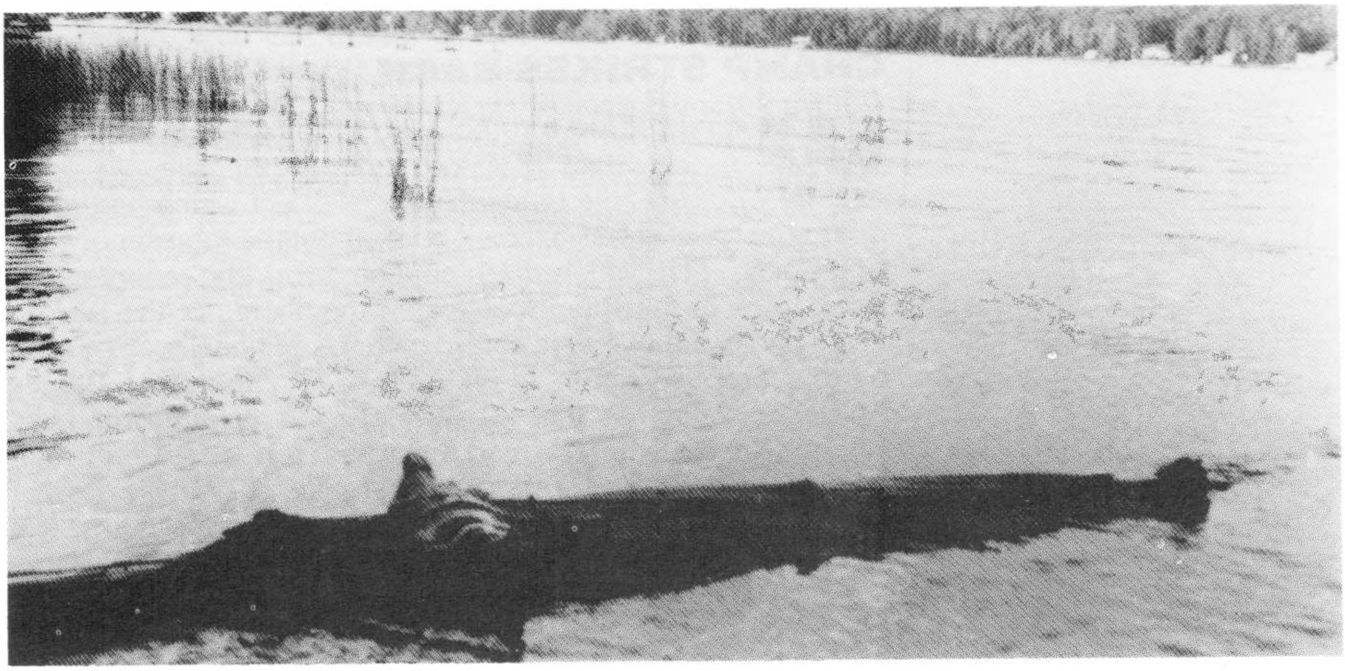
1.4

LAKE AYLMER: THE HORRORS OF THE BOTTOMLESS LAKE

The monster of Lake Champlain is today besieged by international news media. Its Québec cousin in Lake Pohénégamook had its hour of glory in 1977 in the regional press, but could re-surface at any time. But what happens when the newspapers – the main consumers of the floating logs associated with monsters – cease re-telling stories of these appearances? Such a thing did happen in the case of the "sea-monster" of Lake Aylmer in Estrie.

On the shores of the lake, at Garthby and at Disraéli, the sea-monster was much discussed 20 years ago. Someone from the area told us that researchers even came from Sherbrooke to inquire after it. The alleged phenomenon, in all its immensity, had shown itself frequently from 1955 to 1958, since when its appearances became less and less frequent. One of the last was over 10 years ago; since then: virtual silence. One of the last eyewitnesses, Mr. Paul-Émile Grenier, a former municipal inspector, reconstructed his memories for us one evening after supper. In 1958 he saw the beast on three different occasions, and at each of its appearances the lake was completely

Paul-Émile Grenier.
[© **Michel Meurger.**]



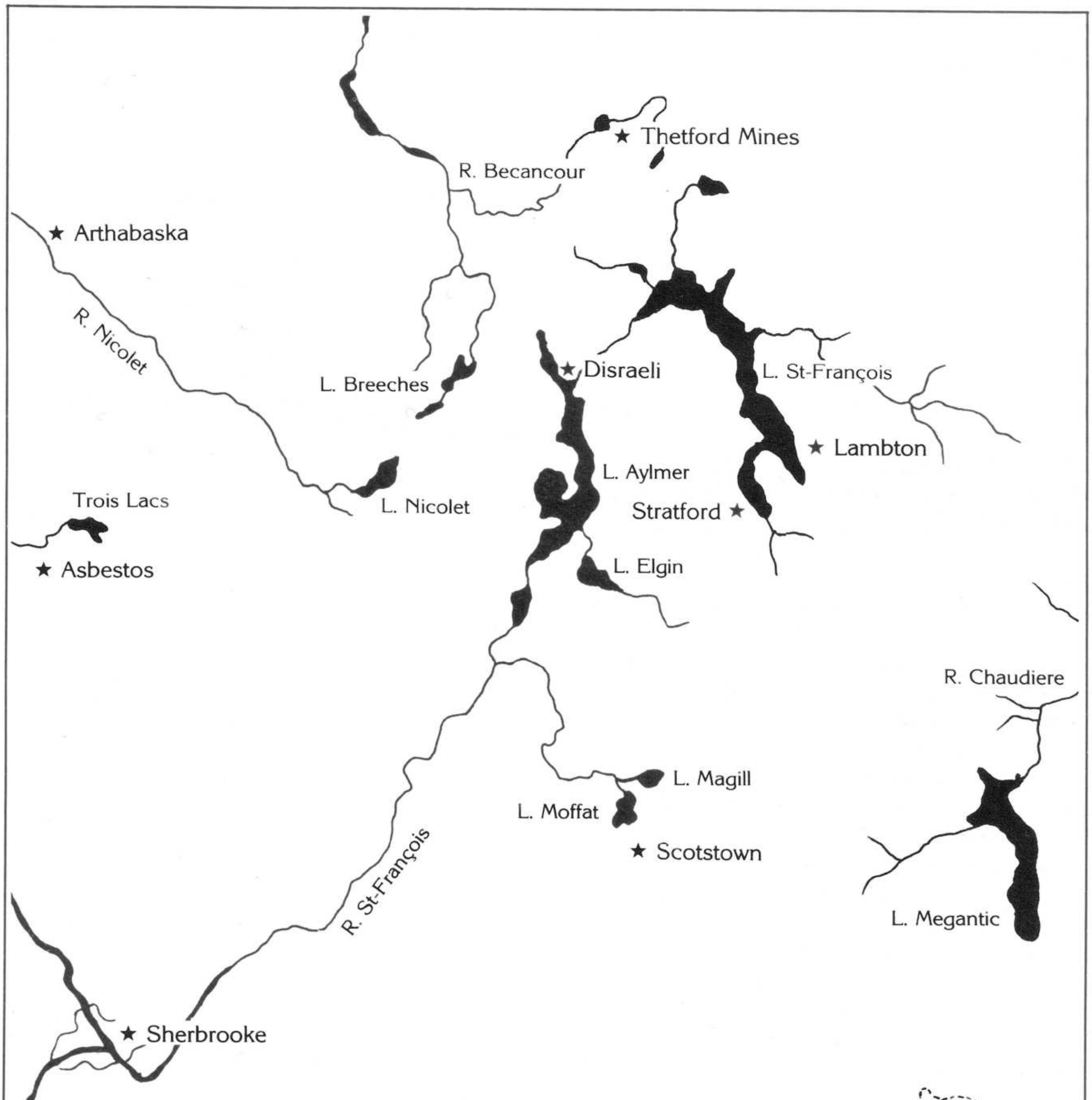
Lake Aylmer. [© Michel Meurger.]

calm. "When there are waves you can't see it," he said. Once when Grenier, an excellent shot, was in his canoe: "I had the idea of shooting with my carbine, but it was too far away and disappeared in the water." He insists on the extraordinary speed of the creature. "When it moved, a motorboat couldn't keep up with it. You could see the last fin, which cut through the water more quickly than a 100-horsepower motor."

The features of its appearance are vague. One thing which we have noted consistently in our interviews around Lake Aylmer is that the people we question speak hesitantly of a swell, of a trail; the weight of years has shrivelled the rumour in a magic skin; soon there will hardly be even the shrugging of shoulders.

The monster has not shown itself for a long time. Several causes may have contributed to his disappearance, if he ever existed. Paul-Émile Grenier told us that the Stratford Mine, still active in the 1950s, emptied into the lake. The bed of the river became red – most probably due to acid pollution – and the shore-dwellers had difficulties with the water. Government experts have studied the problem. The numbers of fish have diminished. Could the pollution have killed the creature? The departure of a great number of the shore-dwellers for Thetford Mines broke the social cohesion of the community, suggested one witness. The old generation – "who knew the facts" – has disappeared and the new generation is dispersed throughout Québec or else is indifferent. The smart holiday homes of city dwellers have flourished on the banks; transistors and motorboats resonate everywhere. Together with its object, the rumour has plunged again into oblivion in the deep waters, beyond reach, ungraspable.

A last testimony from a former resident of Disraéli, who left the village in December 1980, confirms the taboo character of the phenomenon in Lake Aylmer. Our informant is a young woman, who knew an older woman of the area who had her residence by the shore. This older woman claimed to have seen the monster in question, which was, according to the confidant, "truly enormous"; so much so that the woman was truly afraid.

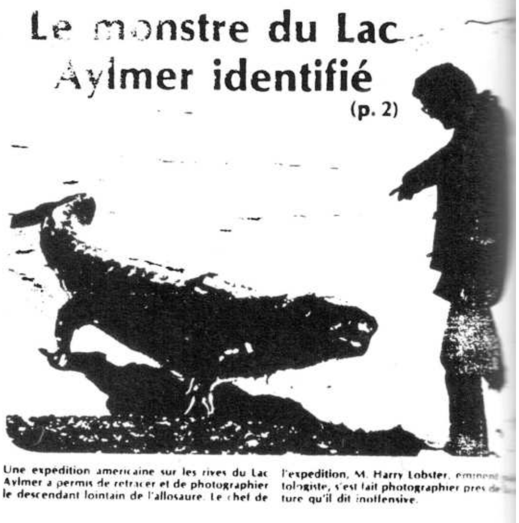

Thetford Mines
R. Becancour
Arthabaska
R. Nicolet
L. Breeches
Disraeli
L. St-François
Lambton
L. Aylmer
Trois Lacs
L. Nicolet
Stratford
Asbestos
L. Elgin
R. Chaudiere
L. Magill
L. Moffat
Scotstown
R. St-François
L. Megantic
Sherbrooke

A simplified map of the Lakes Aylmer and St-François region.

The young woman assured us that several other people dwelling by the lakeside had had similar experiences, but that tradition insisted that they not breathe a word of it, not even among themselves. We must not forget that, in the sixties, three fishermen drowned and their bodies were never recovered. This event, which caused great emotion in the area, would have been enough to bury reports of the different appearances of the strange beast in the mute terror of the local people.

Still, according to our informant, at Les Trois Lacs, not far from Lake Aylmer, there were reports of an enormous fish, which was both the curse and the conversation of the fishermen of the region. According to some, the fish was a *maskinongé*. This enormous fish hibernated in the swamp, in one of the three eponymous lakes making up this group. Rumours concerning this elusive fish are not new. The young woman's father, an amateur fisherman, had told her that he had heard this enormous fish spoken of ever since he was a child. In other words, for more than two generations somebody had caught sight of this shape almost every year. The young woman, herself a keen angler, did not think it likely that this was a *maskinongé*. She rests her judgement on the fact that she once saw, at the National Museum of Miguasha, in Gaspésie, a fish captured by Québec fishermen, some miles off the coast, which was of prehistoric origin. Of the 12 known similar species, she said, those not caught in the Gaspé region had been captured far away in the Sargasso Sea. She concluded that many things are possible, including, to use her own words, *"paranormal phenomena"*, to explain the creature of Lake Aylmer, whose sorties the shore-dwellers sought to hide.

With her testimony, the story of the case of Lake Aylmer, with many questions remaining unanswered, appears to us to be one of the most eloquent illustrations of the fascination and terror which accompanies rumours of lake monsters.



Le monstre du Lac
Aylmer identifié
(p. 2)

Une expédition americaine sur les rives du Lac Aylmer a permis de retracer et de photographier le descendant lointain de l'allosaure. Le chef de l'expedition, M. Harry Lobster, eminent
tologiste, s'est fait photographier pres de
ture qu'il dit inoffensive.

The hoax in *La Tribune*, Sherbrooke, 1 April 1977.

FROM THE WHIRLPOOL TO THE "APRIL-OSAUR"

A last series of testimonies demonstrates that the silence of the inhabitants of the region of Lake Aylmer was founded on perennial fears rather than on general disinterest. One of our informants passed his childhood on the shores of the lake, and he remembers the period during the 1960s when the banks of the rivers were wilder than they are today. Bears used to come down from the woods to carry away garbage from the vacation camps run by the Church; and young people on organised bicycle tours along the banks related stories of the monster. "This lake is evil," they said. His parents recommended that he not go boating with his friends at a certain place, where the waves would rise up to engulf small boats.

Lake Aylmer was said to be a bottomless lake. Our informant knew of a pond equally unfathomable, near Richmond. He spoke, also, of a mysterious communication between Lake Aylmer and its neighbour Lake Saint-François, but it was not a natural connection. To illustrate, he recounted an extraordinary story. At La Tuque, where swimming championships took place regularly, it was believed that the lake communicated with a nearby river by means of an underground passage. People in the region feared that an unlucky swimmer could disappear from the lake by way of this conduit and would find himself in the river. In the same way, the corpses of the drowned "would not be found" in Lake Aylmer, sucked into similar underground shafts. At Sherbrooke, Mrs. Daigneau, of the Eastern Townships Historical Society [1], confirmed: "There was, in the lake, a place so deep that corpses would never return from this spot."

In 1905, "the tragedy of Lake Aylmer" contributed to the sinister reputation of these waters. We find accounts of this accident in the obituaries of *La Tribune*. It concerned the drowning of five persons, among them the curate Hercule Gignac; "The body of this last was never fished out." [2] A cross was placed on the bank to commemorate the tragedy, facing this unfathomable place, beyond Ward Bay. According to Mrs. Daigneau: "It is like a great whirlpool whose bottom can never be found".

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[1] ■ Société d'Histoire des Cantons de l'Est.

[2] ■ André de la Chevrotière, 'La tragédie du lac Aylmer', in supplement to *La Tribune* 28 August 1954.

This whirlpool added its own terrors to those inspired by the monster. One of our witnesses from the fish-farm at Disraéli confirmed that there seemed to exist in the minds of certain of the shore-dwellers a relationship between the drowning of several fishermen and the sighting of a bizarre creature there in the winter of 1976–1977, when a sort of "seal emerged from a hole, in an area where there was no ice". These details were transformed into a joke by the daily *La Tribune*. Appropriately, on the first of April 1977, the paper published a hoax under the alluring title: 'The Monster of Lake Aylmer Identified.' There was even a photo-montage of "an American savant, Professor M. Harry Lobster," facing-off with a sort of ancient dinosaur, depicted in the act of emerging from the lake. The accompanying article, in the same vein, identified the monster as an "April-osaur" [3] a descendant of the allosaur, a great prehistoric reptile. The group of "scholars from Utah" had managed to photograph the beast walking on the ice for a few minutes". [4] The author certainly did not expect the monstrous dimensions of the impact produced by his joke.

The article acted as an authoritative confirmation of rumours about the monster, and a number of terrified shore-dwellers tried to sell their homes. This fact is very important for us. Pressmen know no more, and often they know less, than our witnesses, about the nature of lake monsters, but they have one advantage over these simple testimonies: the authority of the written word. This authority makes their explanations, whether for or against, acceptable. Even those who have witnessed the phenomenon can succumb to the weight of learned ignorance. When the printed page says "No," the witnesses often change their opinions. For example: at Lake Aylmer, Paul-Émile Grenier converted to acceptance of the sturgeon hypothesis to conform with the opinion expressed in the Government book, whose publication he had inadvertently inspired. When the same learned ones appear to confirm the existence of a monster, as in the joke about "Professor Lobster", a panic might well follow. In these two cases it is not the victory of knowledge over ignorance, rather it is the victory of the Gütenberg galaxy over oral folk culture.

1.5

LAKE SAINT-FRANCOIS: RESURRECTION OF A MONSTER

Lake Saint-François is surrounded by vast pine forests and is far more extensive than Lake Aylmer with which it connects by way of the Saint-François River. Beyond Mount Adstock, a curtain of mist half-opens on the Frontenac nature reserve. The place is isolated, wild and susceptible to the wanderings of the black bear. Rain erodes the banks, cutting jagged teeth into the horizon of fir trees and

[3] ■ *"Davrilosaure"*.

[4] ■ 'Le monstre du lac Aylmer identifié,' in *La Tribune* 1 April 1977.

creating a fantastic setting reminiscent of the landscape of Nordic legends. In a small harbour an armada of logs are jammed one on top of the other. There is a race to see which one, by means of pincers and horns shaped by wind and water, will be able to gain access to the main current soonest. This competition reminded us that at the grocer's store at Sainte-Praxéde, in the midst of a group of customers, one of our interlocutors had ventured to describe the monster of Lake Saint-François as an "enormous forked tree trunk, floating at the surface of the water".

Allegedly the facts go back to the 1960s. After the rumours of 1957, something appeared at several places on Lake Aylmer, something which the pollution and the mechanical noises might have led to seek asylum in less troubled waters, protected by the bastion of the forests. In any case, this cannot be explained away simply as a sturgeon or some other fish. At the Disraéli fish-farm, Odina Daigle, who had worked at the dam on the river – a dam which separates the three lakes – formally doubted the existence of an earlier migratory passage. "Blocks of stone, ten inches square (65cm sq.) completely obstructed the river bottom." What did happen in this corner of the world many years ago?

Here, more than at any other lake we've studied, the past seemed to cling to the rocks like a coiled root. In the camping area, the few vacation dwellings are of recent construction. "It's an old, old lake. Thirty years ago there were only two cottages; everything else around here was built in the last twelve years. Cottages were even transported to the shore," confided another of our informants, standing before an isolated bungalow at the border of the hamlet of Sainte-Praxède. She hesitated an instant, and then uttered these words, just as a last squall hid the wild landscape: "People here say that if one could see the bottom of the lake, it would be frightening, because there are enormous things at the bottom."

LIVING TREE TRUNKS AND SUBMARINES

We returned to Saint-François during the winter. An orange full moon danced for the black pines below. It was cold. Doors opened before us: mouths also. The silence of the summer was followed by a vocal consensus concerning the existence of the rumours of a monster."They were talking about it when I was as small as 'that'," avowed one inhabitant of Saint-Daniel. "Divers are said to have sounded the lake and to have proved the existence of this creature in places where it was very deep." Others also told of these unfathomable places.

Some of the residents of Saint-Daniel told us of the existence of a mechanised monster substitute. "Once a fellow made a small submarine which carried contraband as far as Lambton. Several years ago Hervé Darcy saw it. One of these submarines still patrols the neighbouring lake." Since then, according to the same informant, "a metal object has been seen on Lake Aylmer. *It was a small submarine with the head of a horse.* It went back under the ice."

A scene from the United Artists' film *The private life of Sherlock Holmes* **(1970). Set at Loch Ness, in 1887, the famous detective discovers his adversaries are Germans who are operating a submarine disguised as a monster and manned by midgets. Holmes, Watson and their client are thrown out of their boat by the sudden appearance of the 'monster'.**

Ironically, during the making of the film the mechanical model of the monster failed and sank into the Loch's dark waters, thereby providing company of a sort to the monster of legend. [© Associated Press.]

Interestingly, Tim Dinsdale reports a rumour that during WW2, "miniature submarines were tested in secret" in the loch. (Dinsdale 1982, p200.)

In this bizarre description, the inhabitant of Saint-Daniel amalgamates the 1977 description of "the seal emerging from the ice" and the portrait of the monster as a "mutilated horse" at Pohénégamook. With the waving of a bio-mechanical magic wand, the "seal-horse" of Aylmer becomes a machine. "It was a crafted submarine which functioned at night. People could see it in the early hours of the morning. These people worked at the still. The submarine passed under the ice and went as far as Lambton on the other side of the lake."

Add to the monster an iron hull and two windows and you have something like Walt Disney's version of Jules Verne's *Nautilus*. Following the path of the phantom submarine, we came to Lambton, at the other end of the lake. There the tune changed, and the monster, tiring of its armour, like a stripper and her costume, offered us several changes of appearance.

Lambton was a "good shore" for learning more about what we would soon baptise, according to the journalistic precedent, the *Franciscosaur*.

At the Café Vallée, Philéas Vallée confided to us that he and Mr. Bernier, an overseer at the sawmill, had received the confidence of Bernard, the old curate who died in 1966. "The curé had a cottage on the shore and two servant girls. One day he took his boat out, and all of a sudden a swell rose which made his boat veer to one side. The girls cried: 'The Father is finished!'

The thing, whatever it was, was enormous; but it brushed lightly against his boat..."

The people at the Café Vallée counselled us to speak to Louis-Philippe Roy. "He baited traps in the lake with a 500-pound cow in order to grip the monster."

Louis-Philippe Roy, a 65-year-old native of Lambton and treasurer of the Sauvage River Hunting and Fishing Club, received us. He is fascinated by the mystery of the lake, and his interest in the monster has for years taken the form of a combat. *"For 25 years I've hunted the monster of Saint-François,"* he told us. He described the field of combat: "The lake is 21 miles (33.8 km) long and is in the shape of a half-moon. There is pollution from pig-sties...

Louis–Phillipe Roy.
[© Michel Meurger.]

"When they took a sounding, the experts from the Ministry were in my boat. We worked with sonar - they found a maximum depth of 178 feet (54 m) and 170 feet (51 m). Its deepest spot is near the Rivière des Bleuets [Blueberry River]."

Mr. Roy first told us that few people have had the courage to express their ideas concerning the phenomenon, but he was in no doubt: "There are *sea sturgeons* here, as well as sturgeons of the lake. The gamekeeper didn't mention it for fear of being ridiculed. The first one to speak about it was curé Bernard. At first he tried to avoid it, because it came from 15 to 18 inches (38–45 cm) of water. Sturgeons can take on enormous sizes: a federal inspector in Halifax once caught a sturgeon of 20 feet (6 m) and twice took sturgeons of 30 feet (9 m)."

Mr. Roy affirmed: "It's the same thing here, sturgeons of 20 and 30 feet (6–9 m). I once saw two together. A large one of 20 feet passed in front of me and I was afraid. I saw it coming... Seventy-five years ago they built a dam to raise the level of Lake Saint-François. They raised it three times. Today it is up to 28 feet (8.5 m). In the first phase, a *coffer-dam* was needed to hold the water back. Before that, the sturgeons were able to come into the lake to spawn. They have a crown on their neck for every 20 years, and when this has grown, they come to spawn. You can measure their age by the number of these crowns. The large one in the lake is at least 100 years old."

For some time the shore-dwellers have seen these enormous forms gliding on or under the waters,and they're afraid of them. Mr. Roy adds: "Not far from the bridge a man drowned accidentally. We called in divers from Sherbrooke, but they didn't want to go back there. However, the parents wanted them to go down. They saw the sturgeons with the corpse in the centre. They're carrion-eaters with the mentality of a bear. They began to get mean. The smell attracted them."

The episode of the terrified divers at Pohénégamook and at Lake Maskinongé was repeated here at Saint-François. Mr. Roy energetically opposed the idea of a submarine sent from the other side of the lake: "About 35 years ago there was someone who had rented an old grange. His gang had installed a still and sent the brew by hydroplane. People said that it was circulated by submarine, because they saw the steel-grey sturgeon. But for a submarine one needs a base, or else how could it be hidden, with the cottages, in the surrounding forest? And how could it jump over the coffer-dam? In those years it must have been sent off at the river bank, amidst the maples. In Disraéli they were said to be in cahoots with the hotel owner."

During our summer investigation at Sainte-Praxède, someone had tried to explain the monster of Lake Saint-François as "a forked stump floating at the surface of the water." Mr. Roy smiled at this explanation. "This lake has been used for floating logs for a long time. All of the log-floats on the lake used to come between springtime and the month of August, but not any more. From the 15th of July to the 15th of August, that's when you see it [the monster sturgeon] most often. It spends the summer here, and in the winter it hibernates 100 feet down. It's been seen three times in the same week. I've seen it three times. When it's very hot and the lake is very calm, it comes to the surface to warm itself."

Mr. Roy told us that people speak of the beast as "Mr. Roy's sturgeon". The years are, for him, like the rounds of a bitter combat, of which he hopes to be the victor. "I saw it really close. One time, there were even two of them. One in front of the other. I tried to block their path, but they plunged," he added. Mr. Roy believes there is a whole school of sturgeons in Lake Saint-François. "I estimate around eight to ten sturgeons, that's why no one will ever take the upper hand with this kind of fish. We have the eel which hibernated in the slime, but that's not the same. We also had a lot of loaches, but now we have very few. The same thing goes for the carp, which are now more and more rare. These monsters are clearing the lake."

Louis-Philippe Roy's war takes on the character of the defence of the community against a dragon, eager for its riches. But up to this point, his efforts have only resulted in him offering presents to the beast. "*I fed him one summer*; I had 60 hooks in 10 feet (3 m) of water. Once the sturgeon got tangled in my line; not the one that he had in his mouth, but the one next to it. I had blue rock-fish on a four-pound line. I only discovered it the next day. It took three hours to untangle all of that."

After years of cut and tangled lines, Mr. Roy seems to have found the solution. "I made myself something better than a trap. It was an *invention*." His dream: to succeed in bringing the monster onto the river bank.

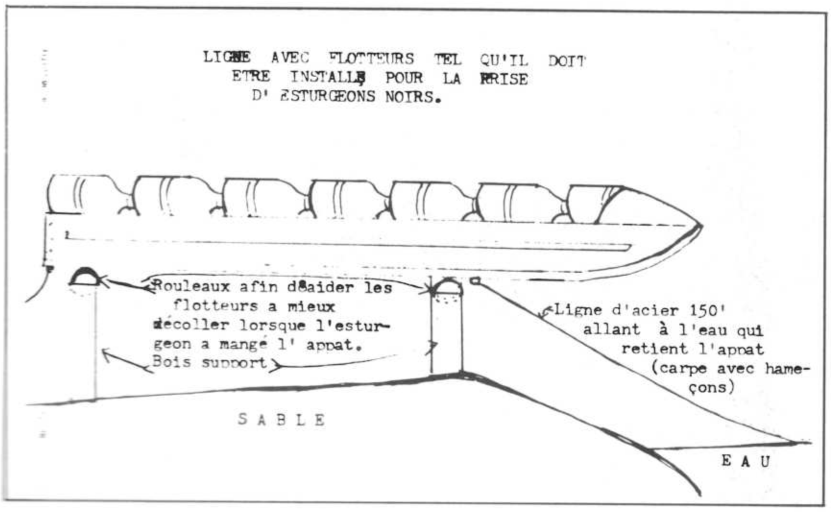
Lake Saint–François, complete with suggestive simulacra.
[© Michel Meurger.]

"I wanted to exploit it and to show it in Sherbrooke. Even if this was only to contradict Jean Conserve, who had spoken of the 'so-called monster of Lake Saint-François' in the *Tribune* in the early 60s. He took us for stupid farmers and liars." There is still difficulty in the capturing of his prize. "When these fish are about to die, they go into the rocks at the bottom of the lake and lie down in the slime. I want to draw one out. A diver will go down and tie a rope around its tail, and then we'll hoist it out with two 100 horse power motors. Otherwise nobody would be able to drag it to the surface. Sometimes one passes by with his back out of the water. It's like a 10-horse powered *boat*. The water passes over, you can see its notched back. It's steel-grey, with scales. With those nothing can hold him back. He's cut 125-pound lines."

According to Mr. Roy, the days of the monster are numbered, and his "plan is all worked out". He describes and draws a plan of the trap with which he counts on capturing the beast of Lake Saint-François. It is a sort of sled made with planks. "It's like a skidoo," he says. "The planks are held up in the water by 21 plastic 'Javex' jars which serve as floats. The frame will hold up 150 feet (45 m) of cables, armed with enormous No. 12 hooks baited with fresh carp. That way he'll tear out his stomach," Mr. Roy says.

Wondering if this extraordinary invention would work, we took our leave, sincerely wishing our host the best of luck, a luck in which, unhappily, we barely believe. First of all, can the fabulous size of the animal seen by Mr. Roy correspond to that considered possible for sturgeons? They usually measure only 12–14 feet (3.65–4.27 m) and not the 30 feet (9 m) attributed to the beast by Mr. Roy. He certainly spoke of the capture of fish of this size by other fishermen. It is possible. But these dimensions seem to correspond better to those of lake monsters, like Ponik, who is said to be, according to Elzéar Sirois, about 40 feet (12 m). If the monster has dimensions of this sort, wouldn't he also have the same shape? Doesn't the silhouette seen by Mr. Roy, with nicks on its back, resemble the "saw-toothed log" of Pohénégamook?

There are many other analogies between the monsters of Lake Saint-François and Lake Aylmer. Our principal witness at


LIGNE AVEC FLOTTEURS TEL QU'IL DOIT ETRE INSTALLE POUR LA PRISE D' ESTURGEONS NOIRS.
Rouleaux afin d'aider les flotteurs a mieux décoller lorsque l'esturgeon a mangé l' appat.
Bois support
Ligne d'acier 150' allant à l'eau qui retient l'appat (carpe avec hameçons)
SABLE
EAU

The trap devised by Louis Phillipe–Roy.

Lake Aylmer, Mr. Paul-Émile Grenier, remarked that the monster preferred to appear during calm weather – "When there are waves, you can't see it". This corresponds to the atmospheric conditions invoked by Mr. Roy, and moreover both creatures have been taken for submarines, which could be explained by the similarity of their shapes. "At full speed its body reminds you of a torpedo," it has been said. But what becomes, at Lake Saint-François, of the "horse's head" description given to the monster at Lake Aylmer? During our conversation, Mr. Roy reluctantly admitted that on his lake "there were those who said that *it had a horse's head*". He adds: "For me, that is just fiction."

It does seem that the beast of Lake Saint-François appears from time to time – in depositions, at least – as a long tapering body, similar to that of the "sturgeon" in the lakes of the Eastern Townships, such as Pohénégamook. We think that one element alone has permitted these silhouettes to pass easily from *the approximate form* of a sturgeon to being identified *as a sturgeon*, and that is the official information booklet. Mr. Roy told us "I have all the documentation of the federal government on sturgeons." Likewise, Mr. Grenier, a witness of the beast of Aylmer, finished by identifying the beast as a sturgeon under the influence of a governmental publication. But at Lake Saint-François Mr. Roy is relatively isolated in his certainty. Everybody else speculates freely about the identity of the mysterious forms, in which most of them believe.

THE SMOOTH BACK AND THE FIN

Two inhabitants of Sherbrooke, Philippe and Pierre Bédard, a father and son who own a cottage on the shores of the lake, are among those believers. Philippe Bédard, the father, remembers: "I was just about to cast my line when I saw a log floating on the water. It was about 12 feet (4 m) long... *suddenly the dead tree was transformed into a fish.* It seemed like a straight log of a very dark colour." [**1**]

We telephoned his son, Pierre Bédard, who told us: "I am a hunter and a fisherman, and was assistant gamekeeper. *This is not always the same animal. There are two different fish.* First there is the one who has *several fins*. I saw two of this type, swimming together. They are truly big, and the head and the tail stay in the water. They are twice as big as I am and I'm not including the part which stays submerged. Below the surface a fish is larger. The third part which can be seen is the size of a 200-pound man (90 kg). You can only see its scaly back – an enormous back with six or seven fins on top of it. These aren't the fins of a shark. I know sharks, and I fish them regularly. (I caught one of 700 pounds, this year in Florida.) It's not a dorsal fin. *It makes something like small waves, from head to tail.* The other kind of fish has *a smooth surface, a dark colour*, and is about 12 feet long (4 m)." In the rest of the conversation with Pierre Bédard we distinguished these two different monsters with the terms "*the fin*" and the "*smooth-back*".

The "smooth-back" is the "dead tree which becomes a fish," as seen by Philippe Bédard. Pierre asserted: "I'm 39 years

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[1] ■ In Arlene Gaal's chronological listing of over 200 reports and sightings on Lake Okanagan, BC., the 'theriomorphic log' motif occurs at least eight times (Gaal 1986, p112–120):

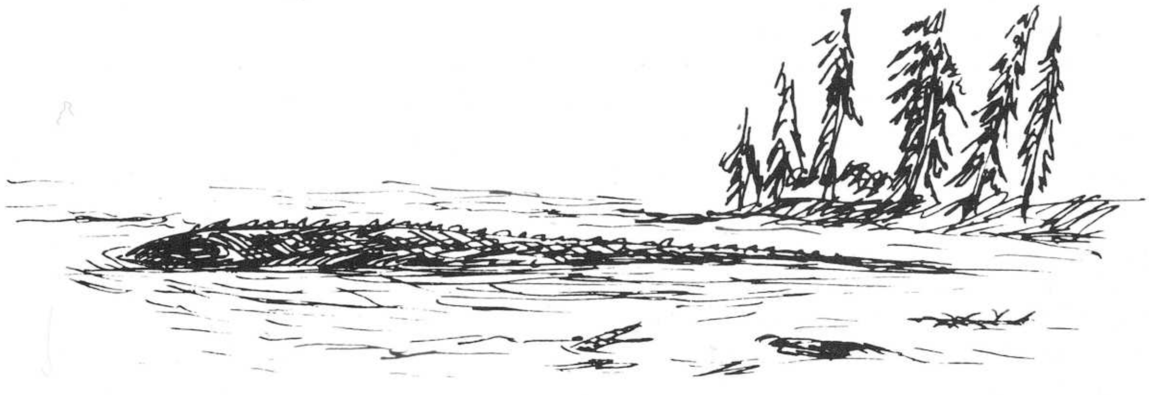
- **1886:** a "log" moves faster than the witness can row.
- **1927,** January: a "shiny black log suddenly sinks".
- **1933,** July: a "huge log" suddenly disappears.
- **1935,** mid-summer: a "log" slithers into the lake.
- **1951,** June: witness startled as a "log suddenly comes to life."
- **1962,** August: "What was first assumed to be a log suddenly transforms and creates a turbulence in the shallow water, then disappears."
- **1984,** 24 March: A "dark brown log" surfaces amid water disturbance. "It was something alive. It moved," said the witness, creating "a whirlpool effect".
- **1984,** 5 April: Two observers at Knox Mountain lookout see "a dark object creating a commotion in the lake below. A section rises out of the water and splashes the surface. It resembles a large log."

old. The first time that I saw the smooth-back, I was 15. I saw him one evening when I was hunting small loaches, a slippery fish, under the branches. I had a light and I heard a sound in the bay, like waves lapping. I raised my light and I could see its back; it had 6-inch waves behind it. The smooth-back was blue-black, or very dark green. It was enormous. With the smooth-back, you can see neither head nor tail. There are no scales. The skin is slick, smooth, blackest black. It doesn't shine. Some people have seen bigger ones than I have; beasts of at least 20 feet (6 m)... My little cousin, Sylvain Bédard, was fishing for perch with friends, when it passed four feet (1 m 20) beneath their boat. It was like a moving trunk, a trunk of 12 feet (4 m). They didn't like that at all. They cried out: '*We've seen the monster.*' He's never come fishing since. The smooth-back stays in the waters near the cottages, closer to the River Sauvage. There, in 40 feet (12 m) of water, there's a sandbank, a kind of plateau; it's a very good spot for doré. That's where it is.

"Twenty years ago," he continues, "the smooth-back ate one of our ducks, which must have weighed between seven and eight pounds. There were a dozen ducks together, 50 feet (15 m) from the shore. An immense fish came from underneath, and we never saw the duck again. My aunt saw everything from the verandah of the cottage. I've seen the smooth-back on three occasions. Once I saw it swimming near the surface, not far from the bridge, towards the head of the lake. I've been fishing for pike for a long time in the north, fish of 25 pounds, but these were babies compared to that, and let me tell you there are big pikes. My grandfather was a trapper; he lived on the River Sauvage with the Indians; he caught fish six feet long in this river and broke his oar on others. He wasn't able to catch them. He told me that at the Saint-François *dam*, workers saw a six-foot sturgeon jumping, and that they killed it."

We asked Pierre Bédard whether he identified the "fin" as a big sturgeon. "I know the fish in the sea and in fresh water, and I have a book on all the fish in Canada. The one with fins on its back resembles a sturgeon, but I do not believe it is one. I've seen sturgeon in the aquarium in Québec. This beast in Lake Saint-François resembles a sturgeon more than anything else, but it's not one." He just missed shooting one of the "large fish" of the lake. "One evening in 1980, I had a 35 carbine. I wanted to shoot at it, but there were two fishing boats, and I didn't want to take the risk."

Pierre Bédard made a bizarre statement about the creature the shore-dwellers call the "monster" - "We don't have a name for it, and that's the reason why we call it the 'monster'". This beast, "even from 1200 feet (400 m) away, was so large that you could see it easily." Yet Pierre, who ploughs the lake with his sonar, hasn't been able to register this enormous mass using his modern apparatus. "From 7:00 to 10:00 o'clock every evening I go fishing. I've never seen it on the sonar fish-detector of my boat, even though I've looked for it." In this regard, we are familiar with the disappointing results of sonar at Loch Ness. At the time of the sonar investigations of Lake Saint-François, could the monster have been hiding in the lower depths? Or perhaps the monster exists only in the rhetoric of belief?



An impression of the monster of Lake Saint-François, after descriptions of witnesses; by Michel Meurger. [© Michel Meurger]

Pierre Bédard takes up a theme we've already heard: "A man from Thetford Mines drowned near the bridge 15 years ago. Three frogmen from the Sûreté went down to the bottom. They came up saying *'We're not going down there any more. The fish are bigger than we are.'*"

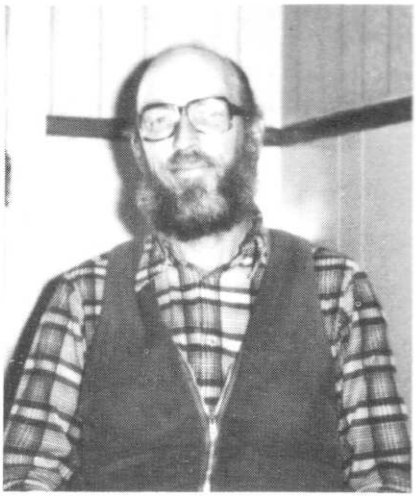
Here it is not a question of ordinary sturgeon. Pierre Bédard takes his photographic apparatus when he goes out on the lake but has never been able to take a picture of the monster. "It's always very sudden," his father had already told us, "too quick to be able to be on the look-out with the 35 mm in your hand." At Loch Ness, those hunting pictures have also been surprised by the speed of surfacing and diving. This game of hide-and-seek is not a definitive disappearing. Our witness doesn't believe that the monster has vanished for good. "It's always there, this fish." In any case, the monster, or monsters, play a great role in the fishing hours of Pierre Bédard. "*Every time I go out on the lake, I think that it would be a pleasure to see it there.*"

The testimony of Pierre Bédard is basic. It demonstrates that *many* and *diverse* forms are contained under the general term of monster at Lake Saint-François. The more we accumulate testimonies, the more this monster (like Ponik among others) seems to take on different appearances to escape identification as well as the fisherman's line.

COMMUNICATING LAKES AND PERISCOPES

Another series of testimonies highlights this impression. We telephoned Henri-Louis Gaulin. In the summer of 1981, when he was working with Mrs. Roger Roy in the postal service, he had a strange experience: "I was in a car, on the other bank of the River Sauvage. There seemed to be *a boat* on the lake. *It was going fast,* as if with a motor, then it disappeared, in one instant. *It was like a submarine.*"

This strange submarine resurfaced in the declarations at Lambton. At the home of Toussaint Dostie, in the same community, his son Marc spoke to us about the submarine. "There must be a man who has a submarine in the village, and who goes along the lake." He showed us the window from which he, his father, and his friends have often seen what they call the "*appearances*" on the water. "An enormous trail, *a long black line, about 20 or 30 feet in length. It's like something jagged on top.*" According to him: "*a large number of the inhabitants* have seen it, and when the lake is calm it makes enormous waves. Sometimes we get our telescopes out between the two houses and you can see that black line. It has to be big if we can see it from here, since we're far from the lake. It's black, black as a doré's head, or a carp's."



Toussaint Dostie.
[© Michel Meurger.]

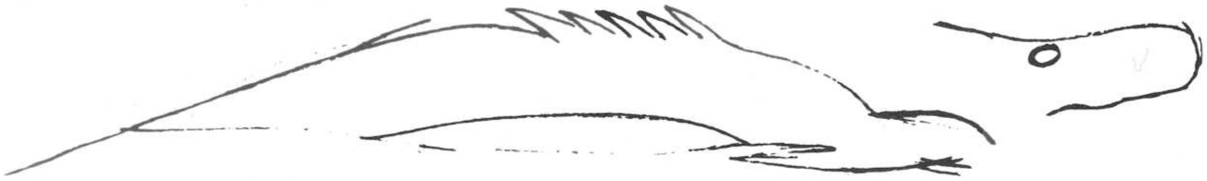
Marc Dostie himself remembers numerous encounters with the creature on Lake Saint-François. "We guys go fishing in the middle of the lake. We thought we had hooked into the bottom once, because my father cried out: *'I'm caught; it's going to make the boat turn over'.*" The stories of Mr. Roy's divers, third version: "When the divers arrived at the bottom, they touched something. They thought they had found a big dead body. *Suddenly it started to shift and to move around.* They said: *'We'll never come back here again.'*"

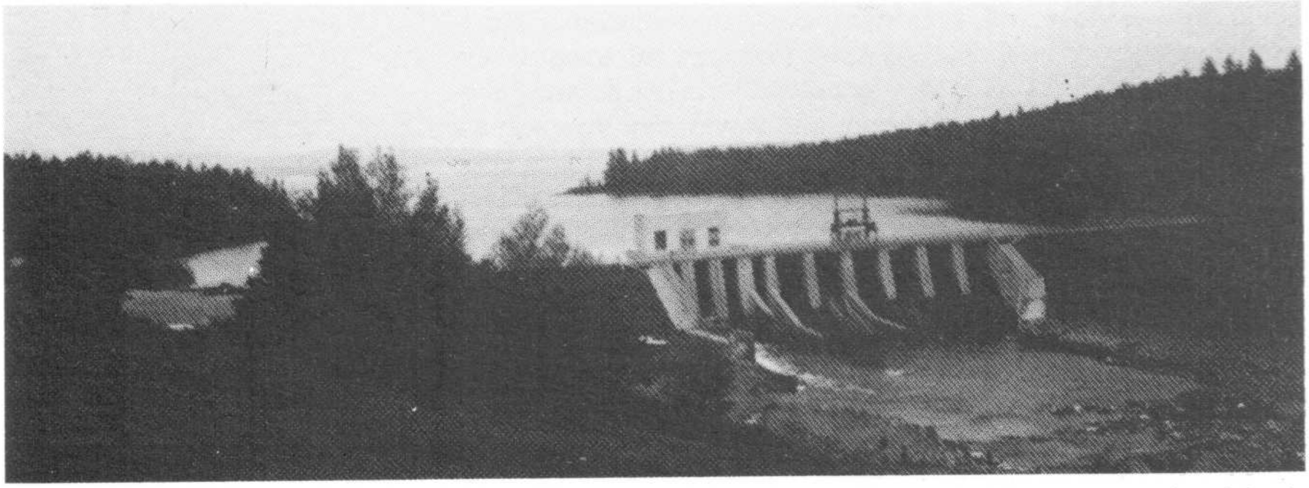
Toussaint Dostie arrives. He is a tall, thin man, 59 years old; his colourful chequered shirt accentuates the sporting character of this assistant gamekeeper, who knows the lake like the back of his hand. "The first time that I saw it," he said, "was 10 years ago, about 1969, with my telescope. I followed it for *an hour and a half.* It came up again between the two islands towards Sainte-Praxède, and went on like that." He undulated his hand. "It had a flat head and large round eyes. *The head is elongated.* It's a little like *a crocodile* when it goes into the water. It's an animal about 15–20 feet (4.5–6.0 m) long, all jagged on the top. It's a brown colour, like the colour of a pike. Since then I have seen it just across the lake, every summer around the first of July, except for this year. Some years I saw it two or three times a week, but this summer not at all."

As for the sturgeon hypothesis, Mr. Dostie remarks: "I don't know about that. I wouldn't say that it's a sturgeon. I saw sturgeons during the log-floating 40 years ago. Robert Turcotte saw one about six to eight feet (1.8–2.5 m) long, but when this thing passed close to me and under the boat of Philippe Bédard, who didn't even believe in it then, at least 20 feet (6 m) came out of the water. I've read in books that sturgeon never get that big."

Mr. Roy had told us that he'd seen scales. On the contrary Mr. Dostie declared: "You can't see scales, it's all spotted like a fish which lives in the slime, and washes itself in the water; it's black, black."

A sketch by Toussaint Dostie.
[Michel Meurger]





The dam separating Lakes Saint-Francois and Aylmer, where Toussaint Dostie saw the "periscope" on a calm day.
[© Michel Meurger.]

The sightings were mostly made "at about eight o'clock in the evening, or sometimes at noon." (*"When the doré go down, this thing comes up."*)

The peaceful hours of fishing are disturbed by the monster, which emerges at random, without warning. "We were fishing, 500 or 600 feet (150–200 m) from the cottage of Philippe Bédard; all of a sudden it came to the surface. The lake had been calm and we saw a beast emerge and make a swell three feet high," said Mr. Dostie.

The monster seems to be part of a collection of enigmas of which his presence is only *one part*. As at Pohénégamook, a context appropriate to the content; *a monstrous landscape*, in which these sightings can take place, is necessary. Before his father came, Marc Dostie told us about *the underground river*. "We usually find drowned people after about two or three days. Sometimes you never find them again. My father says that there's an underground river, which comes from the middle of the lake and continues beyond. The bodies slip in there and don't come up to the surface again. *The 'river' should be between the two islands and it's often over there that you see the animal.*" His father substantiated these claims: "The underground river would be over there between the two islands facing the camp grounds close to Disraéli. *One person who drowned here was found in Lake Aylmer on the other side of the Disraéli dam*. There are divers who feel as if they're being drawn into 70 feet of water at that place. The current sucks them in."

While photographing this dam, we were struck by its proportions. At Disraéli, Odina Daigle, who had worked on its construction, had assured us that no fish could possibly cross over it. This difficulty would be resolved by the 'underground passage' between the two lakes. The 'river', coming from Lake Saint-François, is said to end in Lake Aylmer, perhaps at the unfathomable spot in Ward Bay, where the "great eddy" is said to be. [2]

In any case, this notion precisely supports the remark of our reporter at Lake Aylmer regarding a secret connection with Lake Saint-François. The appearances of the monster in the two lakes would be explained, as would those of the submarines seen in the two bodies of water. Mr. Dostie has a remarkable story to tell us: "Suddenly, from your boat you see something emerge; no submarine has a head like that. However, about two years ago we observed a submarine periscope in Lake Saint-François, near Saint-Daniel. We were going over towards the Disraéli *dam*, which wasn't very far away. The lake was very calm. We saw the periscope at the end, and it was big. When I saw this thing, I steered clear."

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[2] ■ See back to p60.

The mysterious periscope has been seen at the site of the *dam*, as if to confirm the existence of the invisible passage to Lake Aylmer at that point. Mr. Dostie returned to the secrets of the current: "Drowned bodies could have passed through the underground river; the divers feel themselves drawn in there; your line changes direction at that spot; you feel something like a suction. When divers come up, they declare: 'If you had seen the big fish there, never in your life would you risk swimming there.'"

There are "big fish" and "another thing". This "thing" has colossal strength and proves it to the most daring fisherman. "There is a fellow from Disraéli who came fishing in Lake Saint-François with a line of 112 pounds TS [test strength]," said Mr. Dostie. "He was casting, and suddenly he cried out: *'I'm caught!'* Three men came to help him, and could not pull it free. They had to cut the line." Marc Dostie, a man who knows nature, mocks those who, without any practical knowledge, bring the argument back to some known species of fish. "It's not a pike that made a hole this big in my nets." He spreads both his hands. "It was a hole two foot (6 m) big. If it had been a motor, it would have torn up." Mr. Dostie and others, like Louis-Philippe Roy, have tried to capture the animal. "The government recommends that people use a net to capture the beast. You would need a steel one, but that would cost $1,000 a day. It's too expensive."

At the door, Mr. Dostie tosses one more recollection our way: "I had an 18-inch (45 cm) carp cut in two, like that. I had it on my line and suddenly the boat veered. I let out the line, and let it out, and then nothing. My carp was cut clean. It was just in front. It was cut as if by a dull axe. It happened near Blueberry River in 120 feet (36 m) of water when I was going after the big trout."

A story obtained at the end of our investigation helped clear up some of the differences that we had heard among our witnesses. Robert Turcotte has seen the monster twice on Lake Saint-François. The first time: "It was 20 feet (6 m) long; it came three feet out of the water (90 cm). *It was like a whale; the back was round.* We couldn't see the head." Jocelyn Saint-Pierre's grandson, who worked at James Bay, has seen whales of 2,500 pounds. Robert Turcotte believes it must have been bigger than that. "The other time there was a bubbling and turbulence 10 feet behind." Jocelyn Saint-Pierre himself observed two monsters swimming together "like dolphins" in *August 1981*, frustrating the rumours that the monster had disappeared that summer. [**3**]

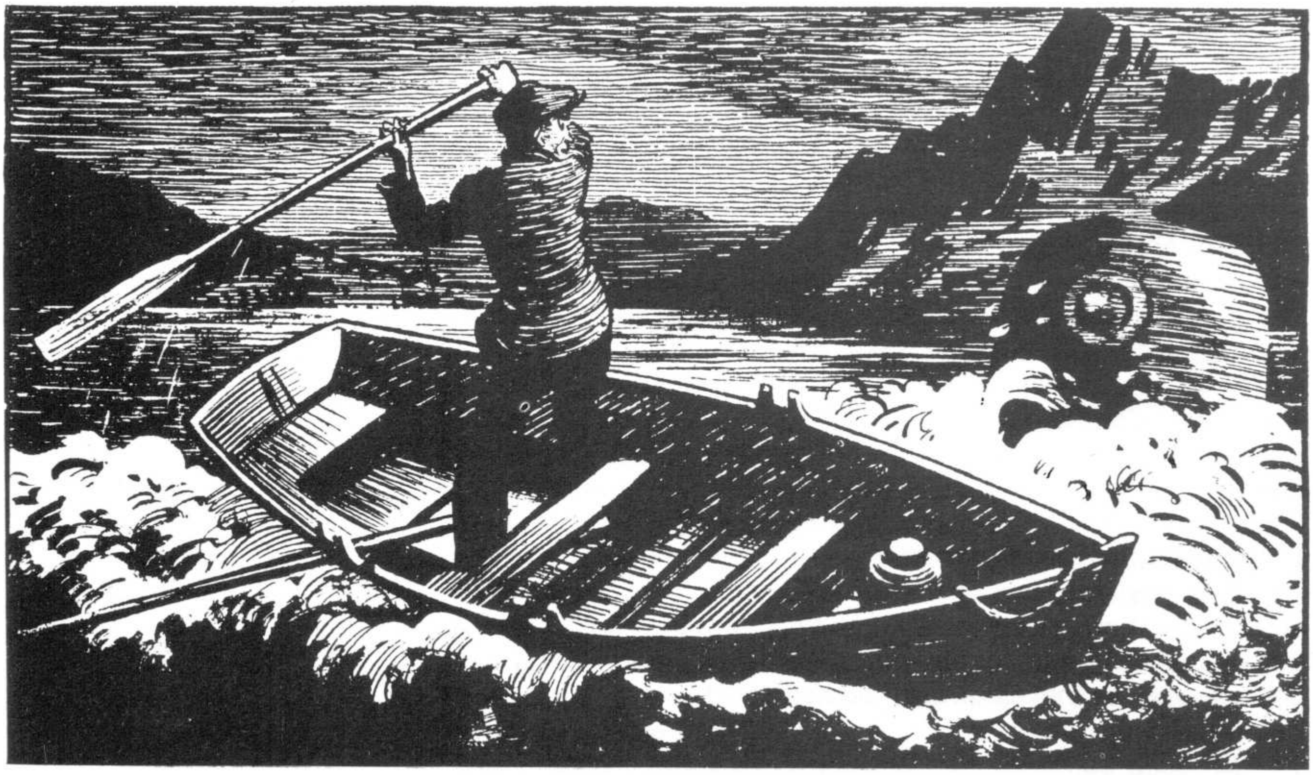
Sturgeon, crocodile, and now whale! Like the *"cadavres exquis"* of the surrealists, the beast of Lake Saint-François borrows his silhouette from one animal, his head from another, from a third his back, and covers himself with a spiny ridge worthy of a dinosaur.

3 ■ Jocelyn Saint-Pierre's observation took place in August 1981. "I was 200ft (60m) away on the bank... *The lake was very still... Suddenly, I saw two waves developing...* At first I thought it was a *rowing-boat*. There were *two* backs, one beside the other. They were grey-brown. They were *like dolphins*. They rose and rose again between two waves... like dolphins coming to the surface and going down again. They were huge, huge... And that was just the visible part, which was between 15 to 20 feet (about 4.5–6m)... *Every time they were seen, the weather was sultry*. The water was, therefore, too warm and *they must have come to breathe*. In any case, they certainly weren't *sturgeons*. *Sturgeons have spines* on their backs; *these two had nice smooth backs...* They've been talked about at Saint-François for 50 years... "

What Jocelyn Saint-Pierre saw reminds us of Father Calixte Bérubé's sighting at Pohénégamook. Quite correctly, Mr. Saint-Pierre points out that the characteristic row of bumps along the length of a sturgeon's spine are quite absent here. These "dolphins", like Mr. Turcotte's "whales", look like *cetaceans*, as does the Saint-François monster. Saint-Pierre saw the same thing as Mr. Gaulin, because he too speaks of a "boat". The description also evokes the phenomenon of *"waves without wind"*, so familiar at Loch Ness.

In comparing the observations of Toussaint Dostie, Robert Turcotte, and Jocelyn Saint-Pierre, we cannot help thinking of that prehistoric reptile most adapted to aquatic life, the *ichthyosaur*, whose body could be taken for a dolphins, and whose snout, with eyes set wide, could look like the round-eyed crocodile head seen by Mr. Dostie.

We do not wish to imply that this "lizard fish" from the past is currently haunting Lake Saint-François, but simply to show that by selecting certain evidence one can build up a coherent creature by enhancing just one aspect of the monster – thus, we have a "big fish" here, a "long-necked seal" there, etc. It is this type of simplification, helped by a sort of 'dinosaur-mania', which has led certainsearchers to choose a contemporary of the ichthyosaur, the plesiosaur with its long neck, out of possible candidates for the identity of Nessie.



From boiling turbulence a monstrous head and cyclopean eye emerge to startle a lone boatman. Cover illustration to 'The Secret of the Loch', a Sexton Blake story in which a Nazi submarine infiltrates Loch Ness (see also the illustrations on pp79 & 81, and in Appendix 6).

From *The Detective Weekly*, **25 May 1940.** [Fortean Picture Library]

ANATOMY OF A MONSTER

Lake Saint-François is a kind of Pohénégamook untouched by media publicity and learned research. But here the community on the banks of the lake has been engaged for decades in a determined but futile effort to chase this "Ponik" away from the place. The strongest fish line, the sharpest hooks, the heaviest fish nets, have never been able to bring up the beast. Fables are woven on their defeats, and Lambton dreams collectively of a machine worthy of catching a plesiosaur. The nets become steel; the hooks become prodigious structures.

The inaccessibility of the monster, if it persists, will rust this entire arsenal out of operation, and in one generation these struggles will have become legendary. They will take on an epic character, the sort of village epic which lacks neither heroes, nor dragon, nor appropriate weapons. The setting is already there: the dark curtains of fir trees of Frontenac Park, with its bears, its lynxes and its less permanent fauna of fears and dreams. The kind of forest in which the Tom Thumb of French fairytales [**4**] is always losing his way.

But what is this monster? First of all, are there several different species of unknown beasts, as the testimony of Pierre Bédard would lead us to understand? We think not. At Pohénégamook itself, the shore-dwellers speak of Ponik sometimes as a *crocodile,* sometimes as a "sea cow" and sometimes as an *enormous sturgeon.* [**5**] They describe its details differently. Despite these discrepancies, there are certain constants. At Pohénégamook, as at Lake Saint-François, the beast usually hides its head and its tail. Marc Dostie assured us that "he never comes out completely."

When Henri-Louis Gaulin suggests the form of *a boat* for the monster of Lake Saint-François, he is also describing one

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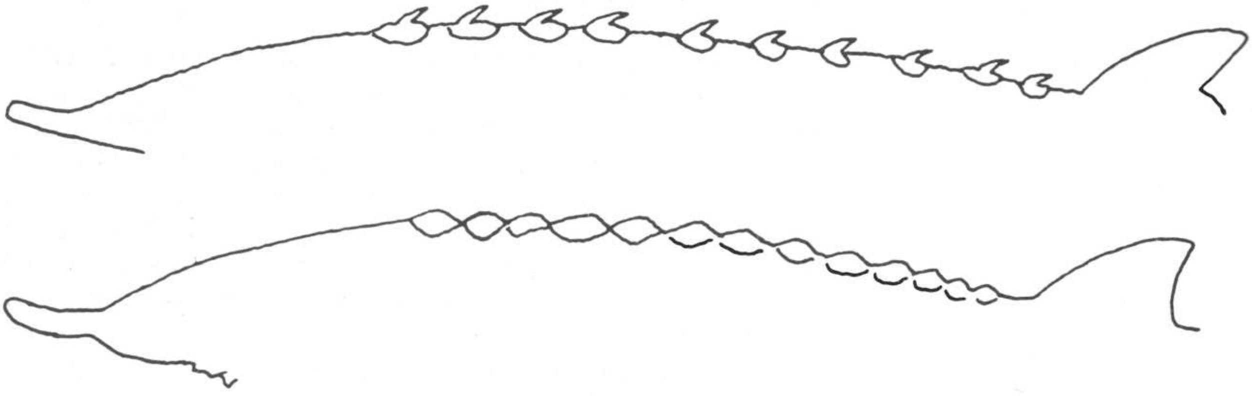
[4] *'Petit Poucet'* – the French Tom Thumb.

[5] G. Théberge 1974.



The disposition of the osseous plaques on the backs of [top] **the snub–nosed marine sturgeon, and** [bottom] **the sturgeon of lakes and rivers. After V. Vladykov,** *Les esturgeons: poissons du Québec* **(1955).**

of the favourite appearances of Ponik, the form of "*an overturned canoe*", as seen by the curate Plante. [6] The observations of the monster as "a boat" are related to the "round back" that Robert Turcotte compared to a whale's back. Didn't Roy Mackal suppose that Champ could be descended from *a primitive whale*, the zeuglodon? In this observation, a perfectly smooth back was seen, swelling above the waters. When Marc Dostie describes a *"jagged black edge"* and Philippe Bédard speaks of *"a straight dark log"*, they are both designating a being similar to the chopping-log or *the jagged log* of Pohénégamook, and also to *"the living tree trunk"* of Lake Okanagan, the strange Ogopogo. [7]

Ogopogo possesses, in certain descriptions, "multiple dorsal fins" [8], like the quasi-sturgeon seen by Pierre Bédard, while *other* observers see the perfectly even back, the "smooth-back" and the "whale" of Mr. Turcotte. At Lake Saint-François the simple "teeth" of some accounts become a veritable "ridge", as in the sketch that Toussaint Dostie agreed to draw for us, while Pierre Bédard denies the existence of the ridge, and suggests rather a series of round fins from head to tail.

At Loch Ness, testimonies also vary widely concerning this ridged back. F.W. Holiday thinks that it might be a matter of scales standing upright; [9] and Roy Mackal refers to the ridge of certain amphibians which, under certain conditions, may sag, giving the well known appearance of the "jagged log". [10]

The "periscope" of Toussaint Dostie is, perhaps, an alternative interpretation of the long neck of a monster like Nessie. Thus, the witnesses of the "serpent" in Idaho's Lake Payette, in 1941, reported that they had seen "a long neck *like a periscope*" quickly coming to the surface. [11]

"The crocodile head" of the Lake Saint–François monster has been observed in numerous other lakes. Ogopogo is said to have an "alligator head". Ponik is described as a "crocodile" and, at Loch Ness itself, in 1933, an aviator discovered a mass which "resembled an alligator". [12] Nessie, like his kin at Lake Saint–François, prefers beautiful days, when the water is warm, for letting himself be seen at the surface. [13]

At Pohénégamook, Elzéar Sirois indicated to us that most of the sightings of Ponik were in an area around a kind of submerged island. Likewise, at Lake Saint–François, Pierre

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6 ■ Yves Pagé, 'Loch Ness, P.Q.' in *l'Actualité* October 1976.
Abbé Leopold Plante's sighting: see also Chapter 5, p249ff.

7 ■ M. Moon 1977.

8 ■ *ibidem*.

9 ■ F.W. Holiday 1968.

10 ■ R.P. Mackal 1976.

11 ■ P. Costello 1975, p237.
Further discussion of Dostie's "periscope", with his sketch, appears in Chapter 5, p251.

12 ■ P. Costello 1975.

13 ■ 'La mystérieuse nageoire du Loch Ness,' in *l'Inexpliqué*, vol.1, N° 9 (1981).

Bédard situated the hideout of the "smooth-back" near the small underwater plateau. The colours of Champ, of Ponik and the monster of Lake Saint-François, are similar. The witnesses insist on the idea of darkness: "he's black, black". Among the alleged proofs for the existence of a powerful predator in the lake of the Eastern Townships, the "cleanly cut" carp of Mr Dostie has unfortunate companions in the salmon of Loch Ness, which allegedly have been found cut cleanly through. These mutilations have been made the object of studies. [**14**] Certain corpses of those drowned in Loch Ness bear analogous marks, according to unverified rumours. [**15**]

The supposed path of the Lake Saint-François monster between Lake Saint-François and Lake Aylmer – Toussaint Dostie's underground river – recalls the supposed connection between Lake Pohénégamook and Lake Temiscouata, according to the tradition of which Corinne Normand-Hudon has made herself the interpreter. [**16**] The resemblances between Lakes Pohénégamook and Saint-François go beyond the similarities between their respective aquatic monsters. At Lambton, as at Saint-Éleuthère, gulfs, eddies and islands seem to be involved in a subtle game which goes beyond the ascertained materiality of everyday life. With the power of oral traditionalism, the informants of monsterdom have woven an enchanted verbal tapestry through which the everyday reality seems to lose its firm contours. But this magic is only a verbal one, and their lake a cultural reflection of the real one. Caught up in this distorting mirror, the clan of fishermen at Lambton take on the marvellous stature of dragon-slayers.

RETURN TO SAINT-FRANCOIS

We met at last with Mrs. Roger Roy, the rural mail courier, who had been with Mr. Gaulin at the time of his observation. She placed the event in about 1979, and not, as Mr. Gaulin maintains, in 1981.

Mrs Roger Roy, and her sketch of the back of the creature she saw. [© Michel Meurger.]

"We were very surprised. In the middle of the lake we saw an enormous back, and then we saw it go under. It was something alive, not a dead body; we could see waves behind it, like a boat ploughing through the water. It was dark and wet. We were on the bridge of the River Sauvage, facing the larger part of the lake. It went very fast, like an upside-down boat, but longer and higher. We saw something like a fin above, which stretched from one end to the other. It was at least 15 feet (4.5 m), and disappeared like a big fat cable which went underwater. We didn't see the tail or the head, as if the fish was swimming on its back."

At her house, Mrs. Roy was more specific about what she meant by fin, and showed us the large dorsal ridge of a sword fish which was hanging on her wall: "it was like that". Her husband informed us that their cottage is next door to that of the old curate Bernard. "When he had his experience, he asked us if we had seen it. He had touched it with his oar." Mr. Roy furnished us with one of the last versions of the "terrified divers": "Someone drowned on the sandbank before the channel of the River Sauvage. The divers who went down to look for the body said that they saw enormous fish: 'You'd be surprised to see the

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[14] R.P. Mackal 1976.

[15] J. Berton 1977.

[16] C. Normand-Hudon 1981.

fish that we saw in that place.'"

Mr. Roy and his son discussed the tradition according to which "the dead are not rendered by Lake Saint-François." "It could be that they simply go away," he remarked in allusion to a story about an overturned boat. Concerning the mouth of the Blueberry River, the deepest part of the lake where the monster is occasionally seen in summer, Mr. Roy was definite: "the turbulence there makes crossings very difficult". In other lakes, the relationship between the monster and tidal disturbances created by winds on the lake is also noticeable. Mr. Roy associated the monster with slimy mudbanks: "Across from our cottage and that of curé Bernard, where the monster was seen, there's a lot of mud. This fish must have lived in the mud."

The mystery of Lake Saint-François is not the only one that he had known in his life. He spoke to us of his discovery of a moose 'cemetery'. "Not far from the River Matane, I came to a small sulphurous river where there was a kind of island; grey, moist ground with a cedar. The earth was eroded all around. In this very dense forest, where it was almost necessary to go on hands and knees, I found the moose antlers. All of their trails from the mountain ended there. Trails which only goats could pass."

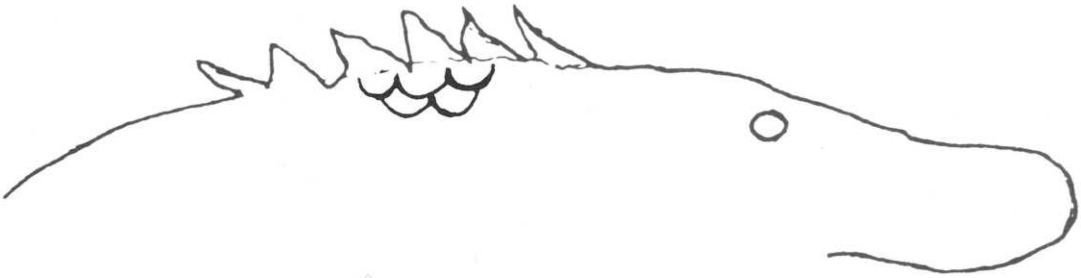
For Mr. Roy, one of the keys to our problem was to be found in the hands of the ancient pioneers of the region who had contact with the indigenous people. "The Indians there were *the Abenakis*. From time to time we would find vestiges of these people. My father, who had done logging on the lake, spoke of them." In leaving the Roys, we fantasised about the moose necropolis, reminiscent of the 'elephants' graveyards' of African romances.

CHILD'S PLAY

Twenty years ago a group of children started, by way of a game, an involuntary investigation which they would remember for the rest of their lives. Mrs. Huguette Boulanger was first to describe their encounter with the monster: "I was nine or ten years old at the time. I was with my brother at the head of the lake, towards Lambton, in the summer. It was very hot. It seemed longer than the boat, at least 12 feet (4 m). *It was covered with fish scales but thicker and shimmering*. We saw the surface of its back at close range, two or three feet from our boat. It made a kind of wave, enough to send the boat along. We were scared for our lives."

We revisited Toussaint Dostie to photograph him. He drew a second silhouette of the monster for us. On this drawing he included "large scales like a crocodile", similar to the "large scales" which Mrs. Boulanger had mentioned. This detail is of considerable importance. Toussaint Dostie, in a first description, had rejected the existence of scales and spoke of the smooth, black skin. Likewise the smooth skin had been mentioned by Bertrand Bureau, brother of Mrs. Boulanger, *who had been with her at the time of their sighting*.

According to Bertrand Bureau of Saint-Romain, whom we met at the garage where he works, he remembered that around



Toussaint Dostie's second sketch. [Michel Meurger]

1967 he was with his sister, in nice weather, and he had seen something "floating in mid-stream. You could say that it was nothing but a piece of wood. Three of us went in a boat to look at it. We thought it was an old log, which we wanted to pick up out of the water. But when we approached it, it plunged down and came up a little further along. It had a smooth back and was grey, the colour of clay. As big as a 45-gallon (200 litre) barrel. It was about 20 feet long (6 m). It disappeared quietly. This thing emerges when the lake has been calm for 3 or 4 days. It comes out to take oxygen."

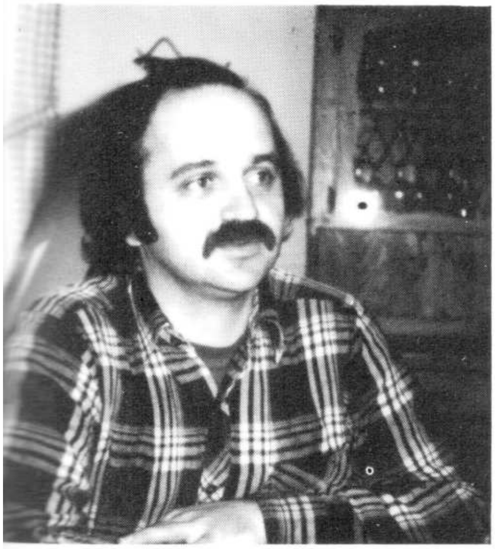
Around Mr. Bureau, people commented energetically on his story. Some of them mentioned the giant hooks of Louis-Philippe Roy, baited with "the heads and backbones of dead cows". Could time have played tricks with Bertrand Bureau's memory? Perhaps. His description is also extremely precise; but the creature seen by Huguette Boulanger and her brother on the same occasion appeared to one like the "crocodile" of Toussaint Dostie, and to the other like the "smooth back" of Pierre Bédard. The third witness of the 1967 sighting confirmed the existence of these real divergences.

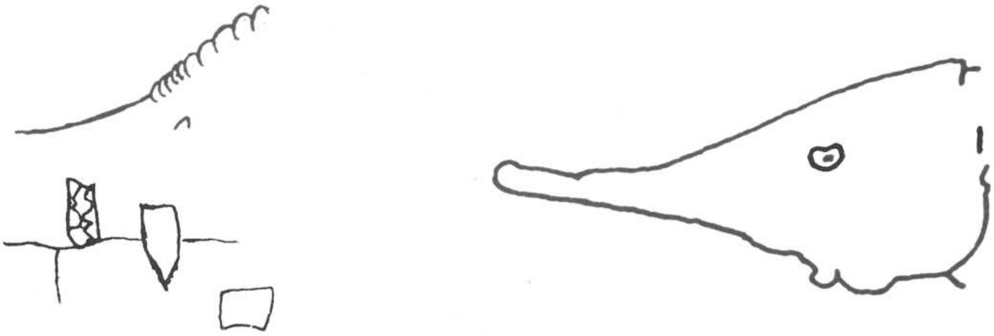
THE ASS'S HEAD

Marcel Richard smiled kindly at us when he learned of the nature of our visit. He corrected the date first of all: "It was 1965, rather than 1967; I was 16 years old at the time. It was a Sunday, at about four or five o'clock. The lake was neither calm nor very agitated. We were on the edge of the lake, at my brother's cottage, which had once belonged to curé Bernard. We saw something like a mass coming quietly and we approached it. *It wasn't one single body, but a body which came in waves.* We decided to go to see it in our big boat. It took two or three minutes but we didn't see anything. We steered to the side and looked. We were under the impression that a large fish had disappeared. Certain people thought that there were several of them. I saw the back of it three times."

We asked him about the contradictions in his story when compared with those of Huguette Boulanger and of Bertrand Bureau. Marcel Richard couldn't remember if they had seen the back emerge at a distance from the boat. The sketch which he made of what he had seen recalled the "rounded fins on the back," or "the large fin" mentioned Pierre Bédard. *Three distinct forms, one for each of the witnesses of the same observation!* Not even the colour was the same! For Mr. Bureau: "grey like the colour of clay." For Mr. Richard: "It was an undulating form

Marcel Richard.
[© Michel Meurger.]





Left: **Marcel Richard's sketch of the back of the creature he saw on Lake St-François, which he described as "coming in waves... "**

Right: **Outline of the head of a black sturgeon.**

of more than one colour: green, dark brown, a little bit like the back of a pike."

The apparently distinct shapes of the "fin", of the "smooth back", could possibly be understood, naturalistically, as the result of sexual dimorphism, or as different eddies in a divergent ideological current. About the monster's head, Marcel Richard said: "There are very few who have seen the head. For some it was long and pointed. Around 1965 or 1966, some people spoke of *an ass's head*. They also said that it was grey like an ass." There is a world of difference between the head of a black sturgeon, which has long pointed snout, and that of an ass!

This strange "crocodile", with fish-like fins and a mammal-like head, provoked a panic in 1965 or 1966, according to Mr. Richard. "We spoke about it on the church steps and at the Co-op. Some people said: 'Haven't you seen the monster?' It wasn't funny." The monster frequented the same places, particularly the muddy waters by the old cottage of curate Bernard. It is there that the ecclesiastic, who died in 1966, just barely managed to keep his boat from going over when it was run into by "something". In 1965, the three children had their misadventure in that very same place. Curate Bernard was a friend of the Richards: "He came to our sugar shack." From his cottage Bernard made several sightings: "Some evenings, at the end of summer, when the sun was very high, he said that he saw them *two by two*," said Mr. Richard. Likewise Pierre Bédard had seen two many-finned monsters swimming together, and Joscelyn Saint-Pierre, two "smooth-backs" going side by side. The curate's dwelling acquired a sinister reputation. When Mr. Richard's brother was thinking of buying it, people exclaimed: "Not *the monster cottage!*" Marcel Richard also knew about the submarine explanation: "When we heard that there was a submarine, people said to themselves: Ah! *So it's mechanical!*"

Ass's head, infamous cottage, submarine. Three oral traditions: the world of animal prodigies, the ghost story, and the adventurer with technical overtones!

THE BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER SAUVAGE

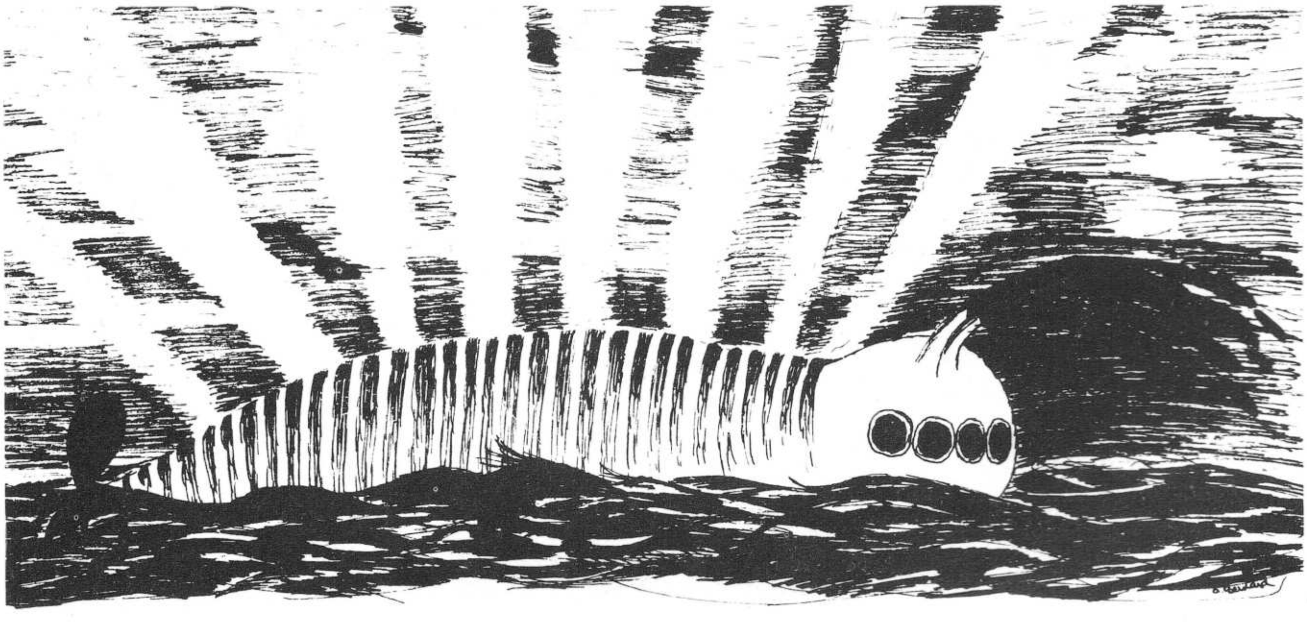
At the Café Vallée we were told of a collective sighting of the monster by the Poulin family. Their daughter, Carole Poulin, answered the telephone. She was twelve years old at the time of the events of 1965. "We were close to the shore. I saw it in the distance, about 100 feet (30m) away.

It was going very quickly. We saw a large smooth back which went in and out of the water. It was all black and plunged again into the middle of the lake."

After interviewing the witnesses, we studied the site of the observations of Mr. Gaulin and Mrs. Roy. There, on the strongly braced iron bridge, the lake opens onto the River Sauvage. At the inn of the same name, the owner, Mrs. Letarte, received us under an enormous stuffed pike. "He's 41 inches (1 m) and weighs 20.5 pounds," she said. "Some people from Boston caught it in the River Sauvage in 1967. Not far from the bridge, in 20 feet (6 m) of water, there are enormous fish. Divers who have gone down there have said: *'It's frightening to see those big fish at the bottom.'*" According to Mrs. Letarte, the rumours about the monster had been growing for the last two or three years: "We've lived here 20 years and people still ask us: *'Is it true that there's a monster?'*"

The pike of the River Sauvage reminded us of the one which André Arsenault – a professional diver and brother of Richard, one of the collaborators of our investigation – had told us about. This pike of the Richelieu River is said to have seized a child by the arm before the eyes of his father and to have dragged him into the water. If the River Sauvage also has beasts of this size, we might have the principal reason for the sightings of the monster near its mouth? But this dainty morsel would make but a mere mouthful for a 30-foot (10 m) predator. Most of the sightings of Nessie are likewise situated near the mouths of rivers.

We left the strange Lake Saint-François, where, in various episodes of the monster's saga, dead trees transform themselves into fish, the smooth backs into scaly ones, and the laws of physics, diluted by mysterious transformations, are no longer consistent. Those messengers of the modern malaise, the UFOs, are part of this 'Circus of Dr Lao' here. That very summer (1981), Jocelyn Vallée confided to us: "My brother heard a noise: a great ball of fire passed over the house". These fugitive fires would barely illuminate the skin of the monster who, like the mystery which surrounds it, is the colour of the night.



This artist's interpretation is based upon an incident during the night of 1 July 1893, when members of a fishing expedition were camped on the shore of Black Fish Bay, Henderson Island, Washington, and were woken by a "horrible noise" and bright "arcs" which lit the surroundings "for miles". The 150ft-long oval-shaped "demon of the deep" which approached the shore was covered with "coarse hair" and bands of copper-like material from which the lights and "waves ofelectricity" were emitted. The air was so charged that each man felt his skin prickling.

Its head was *walrus-like in shape,* **but with six large "dull" eyes. From a pair "horns" came jets of "water that looked like blue fire". Two men were rendered unconscious when the jets splashed them [compare these effects with the incident in Note 13, p149]. In place of a fish's tail this USO sported a propeller. Reported in** *Tacoma Daily Ledger* **(Washington) 3 July 1893; cited in L. Coleman, 1985, p23ff.**

Reports of this sort, combining the elements of flesh-and-blood creatures with nuts-and-bolts machines present similar problems of interpretation as the representations of an unfamiliar animal (eg. the walrus) did in the 15th and 16th centuries – see also Chapter 4, Sections 3 and 4.

Drawing by Anne Bernard. [Courtesy of the Institute of Fortean Studies, Portland, Maine ©]

LAKE MEGANTIC'S 'GERMAN SUBMARINE'

Gratuitous rumours, or even pure inventions, can develop and grow if they find favourable conditions. The story of the "*German submarine* of Lake Megantic" is a relevant illustration.

A journalist, Guy Lavoie, had occasion to publish a memorable "fisherman's story" in the *Courrier de Frontenac.* He confessed to us that he purely and simply invented the discovery, by a team of divers, of the wreck of a German submarine at the dark bottom of Lake Megantic. But this invention, Mr. Lavoie confirmed, "is based on the rumours of submarines said to have ventured into the Saint-Lawrence during the Second World War." [17] However, he added, "on the northern coast, a group of divers had taken the hoax so seriously that they were preparing to 'get an expedition of divers under way' to find the wreckage!" We think that here, as in the case of the Aprilosaurus of Lake Aylmer, the joke, independently of the conscious desire of its author, has *reinforced* a pre-existent idea. Mr. Lavoie, in Montréal, was astonished to learn from us of rumours about the "submarines" of Lake Saint-François.

However, the *Courrier de Frontenac* is read at Lambton, and at the Café Vallée someone suggested to us: "Since the time of the war, in many places they have *experimented with things... with submarines.*" In a few years, we are sure, the German submarine will be in serious competition with the aquatic bootleggers. Many causes will contribute to its success. First of all, the cycle of diffused rumours speculating about the supposed "aquatic Reich". For example, a film shown on the Canadian television networks, about the time of our investigation, portrayed a group of German soldiers who had been turned into amphibians by some sort of a mad scientist in the lagoons of a deserted island. A UFO team from Toronto has taken seriously theories about flying or submarine secret weapons developed before the end of the last world war. [18]

As at Lake Aylmer, the "submarine of Megantic" has perhaps benefited from local traditions about the existence of the monster. *After* Mr. Lavoie had composed his fraud, some divers in the lake are said to have seen "a shadow which was very big" pass by them, as was confirmed by the editor-in-chief of the *Courrier de Frontenac.* If noises about the existence of a monster in Lake Megantic circulate or have circulated, it does not take much imagination to realise that Mr. Lavoie's article is going to help clothe the flanks of the beast with rusted iron and crown it with a periscope. [19]

1.6

THE MONSTER OF MOFFAT LAKE

For once, it was not the reports of correspondents, but a book, which brought the existence of a monster lake to our attention. We found this book in the Department of Rare Books at the University Library at Sherbrooke. It

The media interpretation of the Loch Ness legend in 1933 created an exciting theme for mass-literature: the submarine masquerading as a monster. The French and British illustrations from popular literature in the present work (see also pp71, 81 and Appendix 6) help us consider the possibility of literary influences upon the elaboration of the lake monster–submarine complex in Québec and elsewhere.

Opposite: **Fernand Fau's illustration for G. Le Faure's novel** *La guerre sous l'eau* **(1892), in which the mini submarine of a secret anti-German group sails up the Rhine, surfacing only at night.** [Fortean Picture Library]

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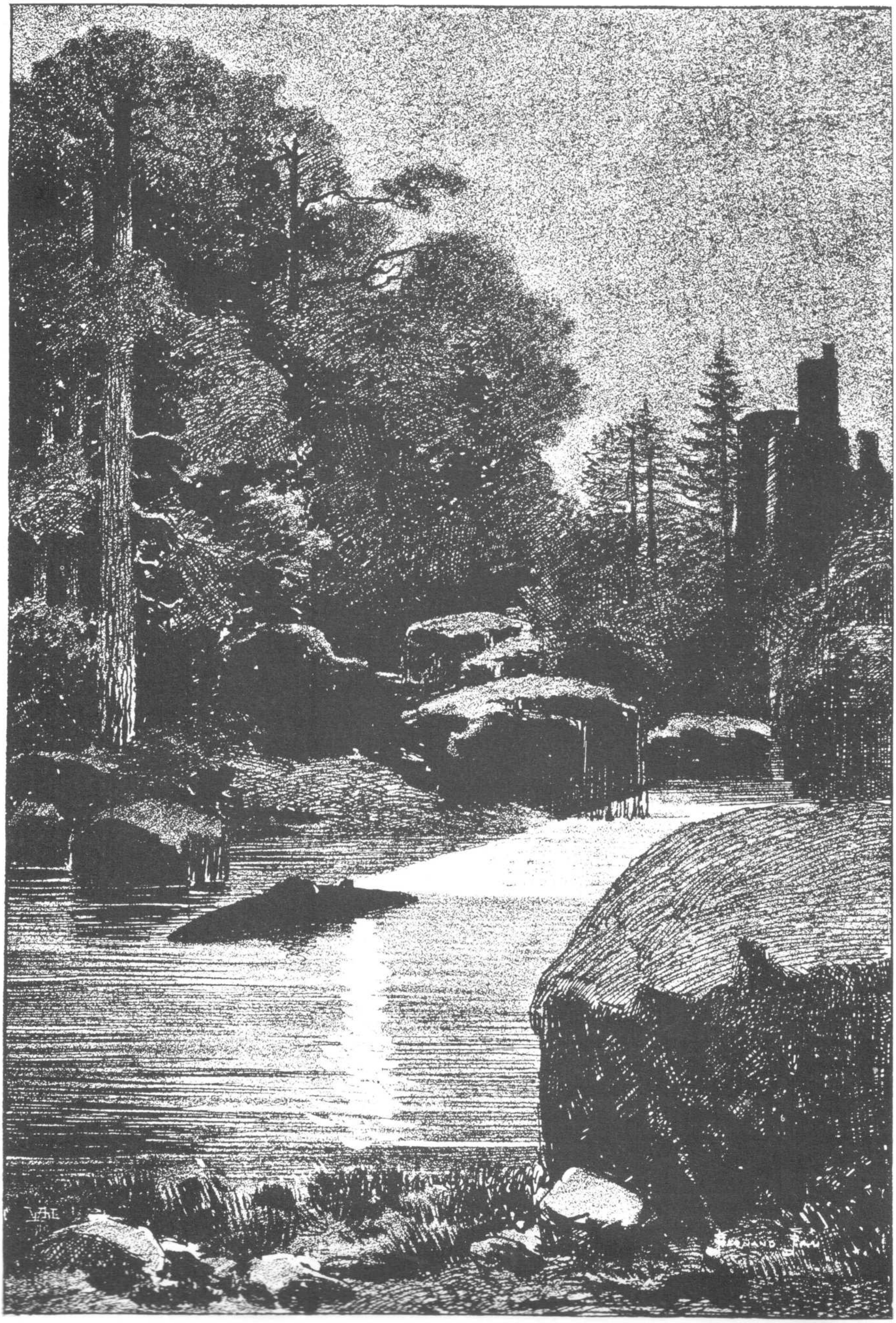
[17] ■ Submarine rumours: see *l'Echo de Frontenac* of 1st April 1980.

A recent American film, *1941*, was inspired by the panic caused in that year by rumours of Japanese submarines arriving on the Californian coast.

[18] ■ M. Sachs 1981.

[19] ■ Modern 'folklore in the making' conceals identical conceptions on both sides of the Atlantic. The Saint-Daniel residents mentioned a *"tiny submarine with a horse's head"* frequenting the waters of Lake Aylmer. According to Angelo Moretti, an Italian journalist, sea- and lake-monsters were underwater UFOs, whose periscopes "look like a horse's head: this sort of tube, thought to be drifting wreckage, has been fished for in the open sea off Freeport, near New York." (Bergier and Gallet 1975).

This is almost Mr. Dostie's "sub telescope", seen at Lake Saint-François, further discussion of which, with his sketch, appears in Chapter 5, p251.



is called *Legends of the Lakes*, by Bertha W. Price. [1] In a rather florid style, the author sings of the beauty of the lakes of the Eastern Townships. Surprise! Under a pile of rose petals and faded lyricism, we encountered "the monster of Moffat Lake". To reassure the lovers of elegy, Bertha Price describes nothing; she is happy merely to make allusion to the thrilling tales of the shore-dwellers. She remarks that at the time of the publication of her work (1923), the rumours of the monster were already old; and she placed them in the 1890s.

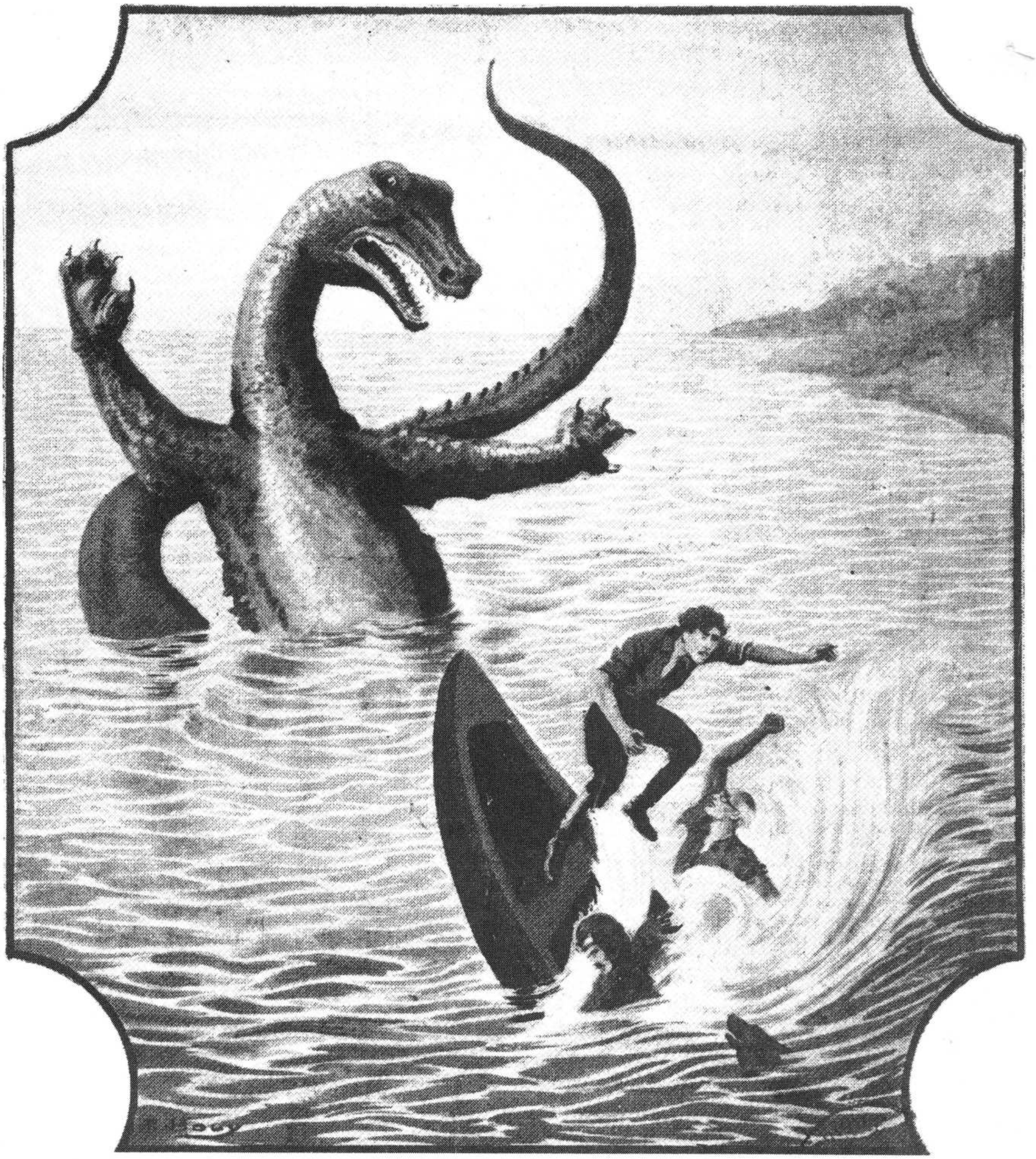
We headed towards this mysterious lake on a beautiful December afternoon. From Gould to Scotstown the rays of winter sun shone weakly on the snow. We stopped to inquire as to our route and the farmer smiled under his *tuque* (a type of cap) when we led the conversation to the subject of the monster. He knew the story well, but it was such a long time ago... Another indicated to us that he "had already read about this in the Sherbrooke *Tribune*", but couldn't recall when...

To get to the lake we had to go on snow-shoes. It was a vast snowy expanse in a circle of pines and firs. Fallen trunks in a horse-shaped frieze barred our way. On the lake of imprisoned water we couldn't see the fantastic turbulence produced by the monster, whose somersaults, in the words of Bertha Price, "gave the appearance of a fuming cauldron". We had to turn back; the darkness caught us on the road and it was night when we got into Scotstown. Its inhabitants also knew of the monster, but as the restaurateur there told us: "I thought it was a publicity gimmick". We learned that the peace of the lake is preserved by its owner, who restricts the number of tourist cottages, with the approval of those inhabitants of Scotstown to whom we spoke. The civilisation of the transistor seemed to be far away.

At the grocery store, one telephone call was enough to introduce us into the house of one of the last people who knew anything about these "old affairs". The lodgings of Harvey and Hilda MacRae are situated well outside of Scotstown. The clear light in the window welcomed us in from the night of luminous snow. In the warmth of the wood panelling our hostess received us in the day room under the sculpted crests of the Scottish ancestors of the couple: the Stewarts for Hilda, and the brandished sword of MacRae for her husband. We sat down, and Mr. MacRae, 79 years old, pointed at a portrait of a white-bearded patriarch. "This is my grandfather, he was a fisherman. He came from Scotland in 1875, and he spoke only Gaelic. He fished in the lake to feed his family. Perhaps he saw the monster, but he never spoke of it. It was the Scots who lived around the lake at that time. The lake itself isn't very big...three miles long (5 km). As for its depth, I've measured the whole lake. In most places it's 22 feet deep (6 m 70). It can go as far as 33 feet (10 m). It is fed by streams. The water is pure and clear and there is no pollution, only that of the motorboats."

Mr. MacRae reflected for an instant. "When I was a young man, there weren't many fish. Later the quantity increased. Perhaps the *sea-serpent* had devoured them." Our host evoked the difficult life that he and his parents had known. He had been a logger in the district around Lake Moffat, and like Mr. Sirois

[1] ■ B. Price 1923.



The artist has exaggerated the stereotype for this cover illustration from issue 95 of the French juvenile adventure periodical *Les voyages aériens d'un petit Parisien á travers le monde* **(1935), by R.M. de Nizerolles.**

In this episode, set in Loch Erne, Scotland, a tiny submarine has been disguised as a dragon with a "horse's head". [Fortean Picture Library]

at Pohénégamook, his words brought forth a time linked to the life and death of the big trees and the trunks at the water's edge. "The old Scots used the wooden logs for fishing. They let them flow in the current. My father was well acquainted with this. Today he would be more than 100 years old.

"The monster probably goes back about 85–100 years to the time when my father was a young man. Once, when he went fishing on the lake on a tree trunk, he saw this thing close to him. It was lying low in the water and it looked like a tree trunk: big, round, and very black. It was about 15–20 feet long, but he saw only part of it. The head and the tail were under the water. As soon as he approached, it submerged itself. Some of our old neighbours saw it at other times. The old men said that nobody could approach the *sea-serpent* because it disappeared quickly."

Mr. MacRae's vision fixed on the past. "These old Scots, they believed that there was a monster. There was a time when this was discussed at length. I've never seen it myself. If there was one, it's gone away. There is a lake a bit farther along, Lake McGill... It could have gone there. [2] However, one of my good friends was in the habit of taking long walks along the banks to find a nice spot for fishing. He went barefoot. There was something *like a big burnt log* across the path. At the moment he was about to step on it, the 'trunk' started up and scuttled into the lake. It was like a big sawmill-log, all black." Mr. MacRae let us meditate upon this log with the manners of an alligator, and concluded: "For us, the monster of Lake Moffat is a thing of the past, of the times of our parents and grandparents. The people who knew anything are all dead."

The snow embraced us again at the door and, stimulated by the cold, we went over all of our facts. The reference by Bertha Price and the testimony of Mr. MacRae coincided in fixing the period of the monster, during the last years of the 19th century. The description of the beast showed its kinship with Ponik. In fact, the "black saw-log" of Moffat Lake closely resembled the "jagged saw-log" seen by Mrs. Donat Levasseur at Pohénégamook. The habit of showing only its back, keeping its head and tail hidden, is also attributed to Ponik by its witnesses, and it is this basic position which the curate Plante of Saint Éleuthère described in adding also the hypothetical limbs of a lizard, a head and a tail. It is true that the misadventure of Mr. MacRae's friend brought to mind something saurian lying immobile in the sun, heating itself. This was a new confirmation that the alleged host of the North American lakes has, in some testimonials, amphibian characteristics.

However, the principal discovery comes from a map. Lake Moffat communicates with Lake Aylmer by the Salmon River. This fact could very well explain the episodic character of the appearances of the monsters of Lake Aylmer and Lake Saint-François if we are dealing with a zoological phenomenon. But we must not forget that what we are collating is definitely *not* a constellation of homogeneous sightings by pragmatic zoologists, but a heterogenous body of material that must be understood in terms of shifting meanings. The "tree-trunk", advanced as a rival to the monster explanation, at Lake Saint-François, becomes an *animated* log at Moffat Lake. What is part of the detractor's repertoire in one place, is the legitimate agent of mystery in another.

1.7

THE SERPENT OF LAKE WILLIAMS

Still in the same region, Lake Williams, some 100 feet deep, very dark and slimy at the bottom, according to the inhabitants of the small lakeside village of Saint-Ferdinand, has also known the presence of a strange creature.

Opposite: **An American newspaper cartoon, from 1983, on the excitement in Sweden caused by sightings of "mystery submarines" which elude the Swedish Navy's attempts to flush them out of remote fjords with depth-bombs and trap them with nets. Like UFOs, these unidentified submarine objects (USOs) also appear and disappear from radar screens.**

Similar sightings date back at least to the 1920s, and are frequently accompanied by reports of mysterious frogmen. In recent years the depth-bombing has angered locals by ruining their once fertile fishing grounds. Following the usual sightings of a "periscope" and fruitless hunts for anomalous radar contacts in the Töre Bay area, near the border with Finland, throughout the summer of 1987, the *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* **newspaper (29 July) reported that a "foreign frogman" had been shot and wounded, but managed to dive back into the sea. Similarly, in 1984, a black-clad frogman was reported to have been found dead and taken to the morgue at Karlskrona. Both rumours (for there were few facts) were vigorously denied by Swedish defence staff.**

Writing in *Fortean Times* **N°49 (Winter 1987, p64), Sven Rosén comments: "In any century previous to the 20th, I have no doubt that the blame would have fallen upon** *Näcken*, **the water-man of Scandinavian tradition who could also appear as a** *Bäckahäst* **(water-horse) or in the guise of a drifting log or an upturned boat. The** *Näcken* **was traditionally regarded as a boundary guardian, so it seems natural for him to show himself at places where there has always been a boundary of some kind. The idea that modern submarine and frogman sightings could be a contemporary expression of traditional** *Näcken* **lore was first brought up in the newspaper** *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* **a few years ago by folklorist Dr Jochum Stattin, who wrote his thesis on** *Näcken* **as a boundary guardian."**

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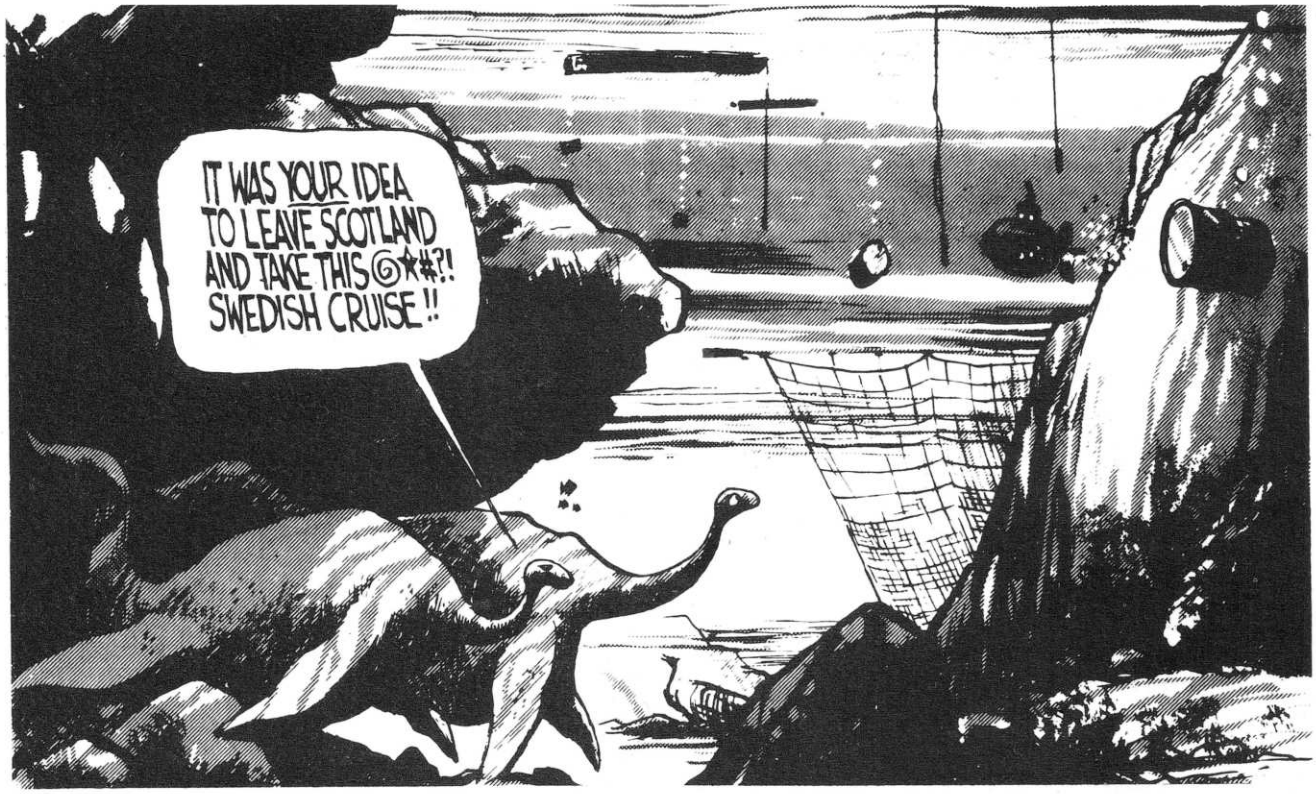
[2] ■ In fact Lakes Moffat and McGill communicate with each other, and with the Salmon River.


IT WAS YOUR IDEA TO LEAVE SCOTLAND AND TAKE THIS @*#?! SWEDISH CRUISE!!

Lake Williams, reputed for its enormous catches – among them a *maskinongé* of 82 inches (2.08 m) fished in 1977 – is the locale of monster rumours which have circulated as far away as Plessisville, several kilometres distant. Here, too, the shore-dwellers spoke to us of divers who have been frightened exploring the lake. Albert Garneau, a septuagenarian, assures us that his mother had spoken to him of having seen "a serpent" when she was young. This brings us back to a period contemporaneous with the testimonies characteristic of this complex of lakes, and even a bit earlier. The old-timer remembers in detail the description his grandmother gave: the serpent measured 30–40 feet (9–12 m) and had a body as big and round "as a flour barrel". This comparison proves the age of the incident and places the chronology of all of these events in the lakes of the east well before the sensationalist hoaxes peddled from time to time in the hotels of the modern villages.

FROM LAKE WILLIAMS TO LAKE BREECHES

It was the lady-mayoress of Saint-Fortunat, a stylish hamlet situated at a crossroads, who furnished the essential information about what we were to come to know about the "monster of Lake Breeches". This body of water tucked into picturesque, hilly countryside connects with Lake Williams, about which our informants would also speak to us. Sometimes fishermen had the misfortune to encounter an enormous "thing of *unbelievable* length which would break their lines," she told us, but "no one has spoken about it for a long time... I came to Saint-Fortunat eight years ago. People spoke about it at that time at the store; it seemed to have just taken place. People don't like to get too close to Lake Breeches;

everybody is afraid of it."

Our investigation came to an end there for a very simple reason: before the Parti Québecois came to power in 1976, the lake belonged to a private fishing club. If the inhabitants of Saint–Fortunat admitted seeing something on the lake before 1976, it is probable that they were trespassing or poaching at the time. Although mouths closed, there were knowing winks and smiles when we spoke about the salmon with which the lake had been seeded. We did, however, glean here and there a few promising remarks like: "It seems that there is no bottom to Lake Breeches."

People seemed reluctant to talk about the shores of the island in the middle of the lake "where the water is as deep as 100–150 feet." A former fishing warden declared that, three years previously, frogmen from the government went down to the bottom: "They said that there was black mud in the water which hindered their observations." Did the serpent of Lake Williams take a brief vacation in these waters, which are as dark as those of his original home?

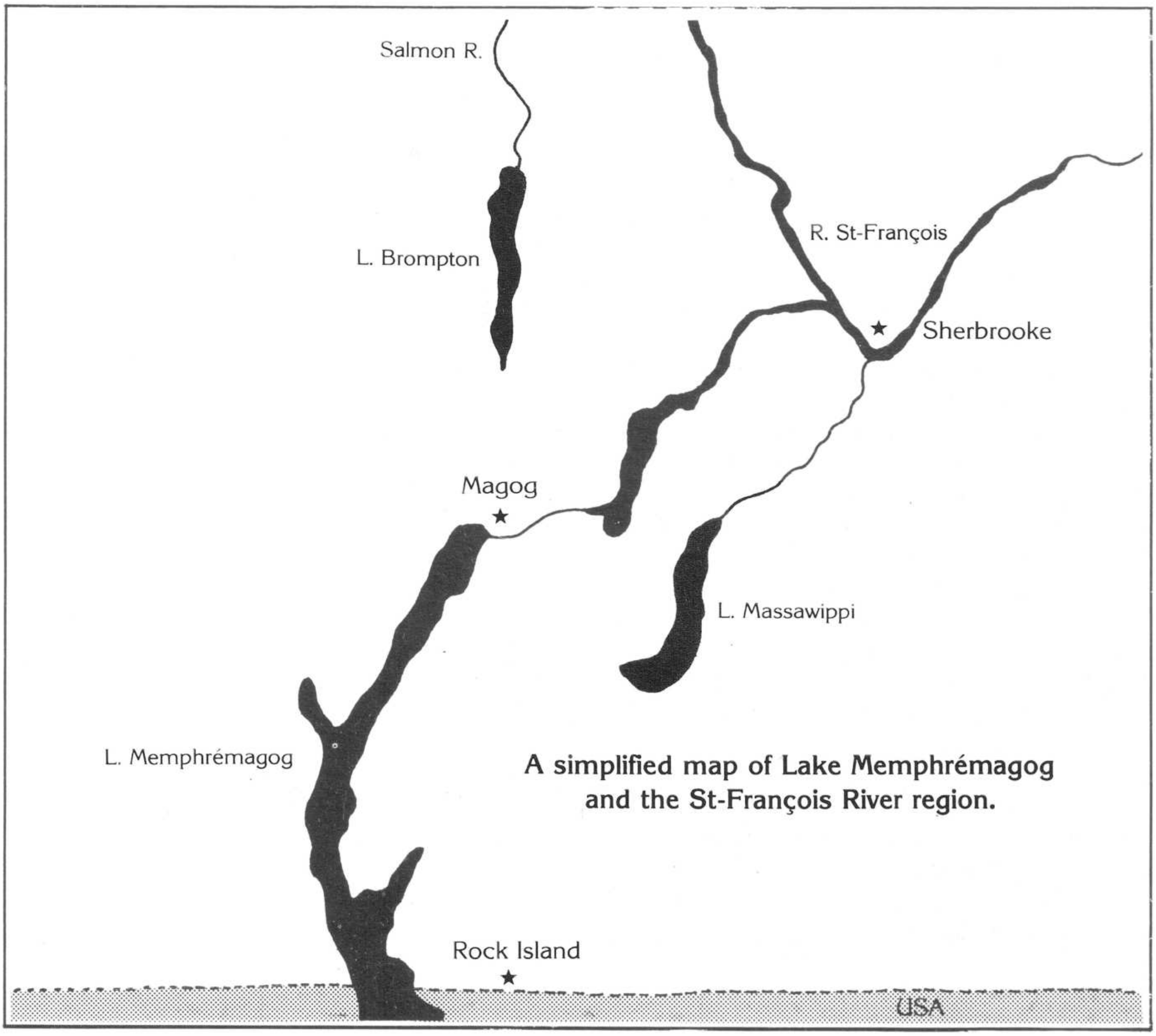
A study of the surroundings of Lake Breeches on a large–scale map revealed that several streams coming *from* the lake ended very *close to Lake Aylmer.* Lake Aylmer, Lake Saint–François, Lake Moffat, Lake Williams, Lake Breeches, these five names define the particular region in which the connections are perhaps not only rivers and streams, but also swamps and discrete patches of forest. This geographical expansion of our subject must also correspond to a reflective deepening. Those five lakes are also linked by roads and social traffic. What the zoologically–orientated will freely interpret as the determination of breeding–grounds for an unknown beast, can more adequately be understood as the discovery of an area of collective belief. Migrations of human inhabitants from one hamlet to another, and story–telling at social occasions are various possibilities for spreading the belief. In any case, the *clustering* of lake monster beliefs in some areas of Québec may be tested by further investigations.

1:8

THE MONSTERS OF MEMPHRÉMAGOG AND MASSAWIPPI

In this part of our investigation, we can begin by stating a rule that we have drawn from our encounters: as soon as we believe that we have found the origins of the stories, information draws us a bit further into the past.

Moffat Lake and Lake Aylmer are communicating lakes. The alleged phenomena at Moffat date back to the 1890s. But there is an even stranger pair of lakes in the Eastern Townships of Estrie. At Sherbrooke, Mrs. Daigneau informed us of old rumours mentioning monsters in the lakes of this region. Firstly, we looked at Lake Memphrémagog, 32 miles long (51.5 km), of which 14 miles (22.5 km) are in the United States. The frontier



A simplified map of Lake Memphrémagog and the St-François River region.

passes through the lake at the locality of Rock Island, which we visited.

A few brief encounters with local shopkeepers taught us that everybody was familiar with the sightings of the monster, even if many are reticent to enter into the details. According to a fishing–tackle merchant, this monster has been described as "horned": "It was like two deer swimming one behind the other with horns, when it passed by; but that was a long time ago." At the grocery store, an English–speaking customer remembered that the *old timers* used to tell children not to get too close to the lake because "otherwise the *sea–serpent* will eat them up." The last sightings date back at least 25–30 years. All of these people emphasised the antiquity of the monster, perhaps to render it inoffensive by burying it under memories of yesterday. The testimony of the garage owner in Stanstead bridges the gap of the years. During the summer of 1975, or 1976, at the end of June or the beginning of July, "a guy from the area who had been working in Manitoba" was fishing one evening for *doré*, and he is said to have seen, across from *Hell's Gate*, at Fitchbay, "*a seal with a long neck...* It was black, and well above the water. In any case, it wasn't a vision, as others said." The garage owner also spoke of a place in Memphrémagog at the foot of the mountain "where there is no bottom."

Here, at Memphrémagog, we have the mysterious seal and the unfathomable hole of Lake Aylmer duplicated! But this does not exhaust our surprises.

We went to the Haskell Library at Rock Island, which is without doubt one of the most unusual libraries in the world: one part of it is in Québec and the other in the United States. We passed through a door and found ourselves, in four short steps, on the other side of the border, in Vermont! The librarian gave us William B. Bullock's *Beautiful Waters*, in the second volume of which we found a section titled *The Legendary Sea-Serpent of Memphrémagog.* [1]

Bullock believed that the tradition of an enormous lake-serpent came from the Amerindians who lived on its shores. "It is said that they were quite terrified, that they dared not swim the lake for fear of being devoured by the monster." [2]

He cites a long poem about the so-called monster, written by some local writer, from which we extract this interesting passage:

"Eyes saw the monster, but *none saw alike,*
He was *half serpent, half horse,* some said,
While others formed him like a huge *long pike*
With thick, bright scales, and round, not flattened head.
Some said he innuendoed as he went,
Quite *snaky,* with his *head save four feet out,*
Erected; others bet the first red cent
Should peep from ashes *he sailed straight as trout,*
Or eel, pickerel, or the plumbest thing about." [3]

The poet continues describing this incredible "half-snake half-quadruped", which resembles both the "mutilated horse" of our witnesses from Pohénégamook, and also the long fish-like silhouette which Paul-Émile Grenier shot at on Lake Aylmer. An important fact is that the poet mentions that nobody saw it in the same way, because it is not only a proof that the indetermination we found is very old, but that also our familiar *distinct* stereotypes appear in Memphrémagog: the Big Fish and the "horse-serpent".

Bullock's first volume includes verses, dating from 1850, by Norman Bingham of Derby, concerning the "legend of the *sea-serpent*", which well pre-date the first rumours at Pohénégamook (1873) and at Moffat (1890). Lake Memphrémagog would then appear to be the oldest of our monster lakes!

In his poem, Bingham recalls the horrible murder of a squaw by her husband. The serpent *sucked her blood,* devoured the cadaver, grew, and began to patrol the lake, attracted by human blood. As the husband–murderer crossed the lake in his canoe, the Indians suddenly saw, emerging on a wave, *"a monster, dark and green, coming with coiling surge and swimming with lifted head and tusk and horn"*, its head like that of *"a furious horse"*. The beast of the lake swallowed the canoe

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1 ■ W.W. Bullock 1938, vol.2,

2 ■ *ibidem..*

3 ■ *ibidem.*

and the assassin, and, ever since, *"the Serpent here now in the depths did roam under Owl's Head to his cavernous home"*. [**4**]

Mrs. Daigneau had already drawn our attention to the place called Owl's Head, a granite mountain overlooking the deepest point in Lake Memphrémagog. The "horse-serpent" of the Indians was said to be tucked away in this abyss, 351 feet deep (170 m) according to the soundings. Public opinion supposed that there were underwater caverns at this place, as the garage owner at Stanstead had told us. This location is one of the most mysterious in the lake's vicinity, and is linked to the history of this border region.

Across from Owl's Head is Skinner's Island, and on its sides there is a cavern 60 feet (18 m) deep where, tradition had it, a famous smuggler of the American-Canadian war era, Uriah Skinner, had hidden. His boat always escaped the pursuit of the border guards, seeming to *"melt into the mist"*. Finally, the guards found his boat, empty, in the shadow of Owl's Head. Six years later, a fisherman discovered a human skull in the cavern of the island and, ever since, this location has been baptised with the name of the vanished evil-doer.

Nobody knows what happened to Uriah Skinner. This region was overrun by Indians, notably the Abenakis. The presence of Whites is comparatively recent. Hertel, of Trois-Rivières, in his expedition against New England, passed through here in 1690. Pierre de Sales-Laterrière, in 1786, described the great portage route of the Indians, which passed by "Lake Mara" as Memphrémagog was then known. [**5**] How many stories could have travelled this route before the written word? At Rock Island, the correspondent for the Stanstead Historical Society, Miss Aline Ricard, tells us that in the past "during the night, we would hear the noise of the smugglers' motorboat on the lake", especially during the period of prohibition. One of Miss Ricard's correspondents confided to us: "When we were young, we weren't permitted to fish at Owl's Head, where very big fish were found in the depths."

We went to the place where the "seal-with-the-long-neck" had been observed in 1976. A resident indicated the precise point above Fitchbay after a long walk across the mountain snow, far from any habitation. There, facing us, was an immensity of shimmering white: the lake. The thick layer of ice which covered it permitted us to walk towards a small heavily wooded island covered with dark rocks called Whetstone. It was a short distance from this island to the point in the gorge called "Hell's Gate", and the trees come right down to the shore. It's an ideal place for smugglers' hideouts. Here, the lake, as if crushed by the massive Owl's Head above it, seemed to doze with a torpor appropriate to the nightmares of cold and solitude. The neighbouring region is quite wild. Lynx and bear still have their lairs there. It may be that a bit of this primitive wild life lasts even longer on the jagged cliffs of Lake Massawippi, the neighbour of Lake Memphrémagog.

Our witnesses constantly referred to Massawippi and its phenomenal fish as a place "where people have been speaking about monsters for years", and where, occasionally, as the garage owner of Stanstead said, *"fish with cows' heads"* will

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[4] ■ W.W. Bullock 1926, vol.1.

[5] ■ W.W. Bullock 1938, vol.2.

surface. [**6**] At Ayer's Cliff, in the Shady Crest Hotel, overlooking Lake Massawippi, we had a drink with the owner, Paul Simard. In the half-light of the bar, the fabulous fishing trophies seemed to swim, weakly, in their familiar depths. Mr. Simard waved at an enormous sturgeon which hung between the antlers of an odd moose of enormous size: "This was taken in 20 feet (6 m) of water. It measures six feet one inch (1.85 m) and weighed 101 pounds (46 kg). There are even bigger ones." A guest , also a fisherman, joined in our conversation. He spoke of the enormous depths of Massawippi, much deeper than Memphrémagog, "more than 1200 feet (365 m)... However, Massawippi always stays at the same level as Memphrémagog, *because there is a tunnel between the two lakes.*"

[6] **6** ■ See Chapter 4, p226.

Mr. Simard pointed out that this hypothetical connection was supposed to be at Black Point. "A biologist from Québec came to check the lake with water-pumps. The lake freezes in February, but sometime later at Black Point. Cables of 1200 feet (365 m) couldn't reach the bottom. Even when the water is calm, a boat veers slightly. It is deep in this place."

Yet another *eddy* like the one at Lake Aylmer! And a place without a bottom! Mr. Simard affirmed: "At Black Point there is no bottom. Divers haven't been down more than 150–200 feet (45–60 m). They saw enormous things. There were divers from the government about 15 years ago who looked for caverns at 250 feet (75 m) and who came up under a mountain."

The cavern at Owl's Head, and that of Pohénégamook, where "the lake goes under the mountain"; the terrified divers; the drowned who did not return – "Two were drowned about 10–12 years ago and nobody has ever found them." – such traditions are perhaps not surprising in a lake where fishing constitutes something of a brotherhood. Mr. Simard is vice-president of the Massawippi Fishing and Game Club, "founded in 1901, the first in Canada". On this quiet, peaceful lake, fishing is more than a simple pastime; it seems to have become an effort to understand the mysteries of the place. The beautiful historic map of Massawippi designed by Major Stein is an example of this. It resembles the maps of the first navigators, decorated with monsters, marvels and legends, such as: "Here are found rocks filled with mysteries and enormous fish". There is also mention of a phenomenal sturgeon, seen for the last time in 1927. Mr. Simard maintains: "These sturgeons came up from the Saint-Lawrence before they built the dams at Windsor and Brompton. When I was 10–12 years old, they found a sturgeon dead on the road. It was 7 feet (2 m) long and it had rotted in the sun. Alive, it must have weighed 250 pounds (110 kilos)."

In the bar, the dim glow of the lights glances off the scales of an enormous grey trout of 33 pounds (15 kilos) hanging near us. In this gloom, the "fish with a cow's head" didn't appear so fabulous. They would almost be at home in such an aquarium of leviathans. Mr. Simard followed our thoughts and continued: "I am from the Bas-du-Fleuve. We were sixteen children; I'm the fourteenth. I was a year old when I arrived at this lake 64 years ago. When I was fifteen years old, our parents told us, when we went swimming, not to go too far because there was a monster in the lake. There was a time during the 1920s when people were afraid to go fishing because of the monster, *the Serpent of Lake Massawippi,* who was six or seven feet long, with the head of a *cat-fish.*"

And previously? What did the Abenaki Indians – who baptised the lake "Massawippi" ("*deep water*") – know? Until 1760 they fished and hunted there. Tradition reports that, previously, a rock on the shores, the "Donda Rock", had a sculpture representing the head of an Indian with a serpent wrapped around its neck. [**7**]

Was this rock interpreted as some altar to a lake-monster, a fearful beast if one believes the legend of the bloodthirsty horse-serpent of Memphrémagog? A Scandinavian parallel to the Memphrémagog tradition of the lake-serpent which grew from a small serpent after tasting the blood of the young murdered woman occurs in Norway, where it is believed that "once serpents have tasted human blood, they search through the lakes, and transform themselves into gigantic monsters." [**8**] The beast of Memphrémagog, swallowing the body of the Indian, reminded us of the monsters of Lake Saint-François lurking among the drowned.

For exploring the history of the Memphrémagog monster who better to guide us than Jacques Boisvert of Magog, who has dived in Lake Massawippi and been 313 times into Lake Memphrémagog "in a search for debris to reconstruct the history of the lake"? [**9**] He is the founder of the Memphrémagog Historical Society. Mr. Boisvert told us of one extraordinary adventure. One morning "in the 1940s," a friend, Noé Viens, telephoned him. Viens' brother-in-law – Hector Guyon, who owns a cottage on the west shore of Memphrémagog, to the north of Green Point – had seen a serpent lounging in the waters every morning during the previous week. Mr. Viens gave us the following account himself: "I didn't believe it. My brother-in-law told me that it floated around, about 300 feet (100 m) from the shore, every morning at 9 o'clock, and that it went away at midday. It basked in the sun. One morning I brought my carbine. My brother-in-law rowed 300 feet from the shore on the calm lake. It was like a grass-snake, big and long, about 150 feet (45m) long, about a foot around (30 cm). Its skin was *like a cat-fish,* brown or black. It shone in the sun. I aimed at it, but before we could come close, it had coiled up like a snake. It came three feet above the surface of the water. I didn't see its stomach. *It coiled up in the middle.* I fired a shot. Too far. It made a great swell like a boat cutting through the water; an enormous wave. We never saw it again. I should have shot when it was coiled in the middle, like a snake." Mr. Viens remembers that "people have spoken about it before, and three others saw it last winter on Lake Memphrémagog, not far from Newport," that is, the part of the lake in the United States.

This immense animal, which brought its body completely out of the water for its plunging flight, was a subject of conversation among the fishermen. We were convinced of this in the course of reports too long-winded to be given here. One would have liked to risk a glance into the abyss of the lake with the hope of discovering this "snake with the shimmering skin."

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7 ■ B. Price 1937.

8 ■ Elisabeth Skjelsvik, 'Norwegian lakes and sea monsters,' in *Norveg Folkelivsgransking,* Oslo, vol 7 (1960).

9 ■ Mr Boisvert has since founded the Société Internationale de Dracontologie Lac Memphrémagog – 446 Principale Ouest, c.p. 220, Magog, PQ J1X 2A9, Canada – to study and publicize the continuing reports from the vicinity of the lake.

MR. BOISVERT'S TIME MACHINE

In his office in Magog, Jacques Boisvert declared: "History unfolds through diving." Few definitions are so exact. In going to the bottom of the lakes, Mr. Boisvert travels back through the centuries. His time machine: two oxygen tanks and a mask! He counts among his accomplishments 566 dives in 24 months in Lake Memphrémagog. He showed us the commonplace treasures that he had removed from the oblivion of the waters. One bottle among the 4,000 he had brought up, a precious plate, the hull of a boat. Object after object, the diver arranged the pieces of the puzzle which permitted him to reconstruct the history of the lake shores by its bottom. The collection of boots taken from oblivion ("the lake is filled with shoes") beats the measure of a frenetic Charleston, sliding on the mud in a waltz rhythm.

At the end of the "mad years", the owner of the Magog theatre, Frank Burns, slipped into the waters with a precious jewel on his finger. "His body has never been recovered." At the lake, people still speak of the "skeleton of Frank Burns". A friend of King George VI, Sir Hugh Allan, who built the paddle-boat *Lady of the Lake*, established his summer residence facing Owl's Head, the deepest point in the lake. Champagne corks popped, masking an explosion. Mr. Boisvert found at the bottom, a gun, which may be the one that Sir Hugh's son-in-law used to blow out his brains.

The diver-historian finds other things in this underwater museum of the parties and the dramas of the golden age of the "Lake Geneva of Canada". There are some encounters: "One November evening, in 1981, in 50 feet (15 m) of water at the aqueduct, I saw the biggest fish that I've ever seen. They belonged to the trout family: I was so staggered by the size of these fish (and moreover, with a mask one sees them as 30% larger), that I came out to tell my assistant about it."

Mr. Boisvert believes in the existence of even larger fish than those he has seen. "What leads me to believe that there are even larger fish is that twice, during the summer of 1981, at about 15 metres down I came into a muddy cloud, a disturbance in the water at the bottom of the lake. I went into this cloud and figured that it was about 10 metres long. At this place there was no current, and nobody would have been able to do that. It could only be a matter of an enormous school of fish. If it hadn't come from the bottom it wouldn't have been such a cloud."

The strangest experience that he remembers is this: "During a night dive with my son (this was the first time for him) we saw 17 types of fish and crustaceans. In a certain, rather deep place, 10 metres from the bottom, in the clear water, I landed on a small black log, *and when I touched it, the log moved away!*"

Here, in Lake Memphrémagog, we learn of the same experience that startled Mr. MacRae's friend at Moffat Lake: that "black trunk" which suddenly comes to life when it is touched. This proves that the story, stereotyped as it is, may proceed from the reworking of a real experience along traditional lines. It is worth considering, in this connection, an encounter with the

Jacques Boisvert, president of the International Dracontology Society, with some of his treasures recovered from the depths of Lake Memphrémagog. [© Renaud Thomas.]

Ogopogo of British Columbia, during the summer of 1975, in which the Gellatlys' little girl noticed a "trunk" resting on a sandbank. Suddenly, to the horror of the little girl, the object started to move in a sinuous motion, and slid into the water. [**10**]

It is extremely curious that the "living trunk" stories are often related to lakes where there were log-floats: Lake Memphrémagog, Pohénégamook, and Lake Saint-François. Of Memphrémagog, Mr. Boisvert remarked: "There are enough logs at the bottom to set up a business. Budd Nelson, the mayor of Newport, removed 5,000–6,000 logs in 1953."

Among many other mysteries at Memphrémagog are three enigmas which Mr. Boisvert describes in these terms: "At the bottom of the lake I found matter which resembles cow-dung. I found it in 40–50 feet (12–15 m) of water. At Ottawa they're conducting an inquiry." There are also the strange lights of the deep: "You direct yourself towards something. First it's in shadow and then there's a sudden luminosity". And also the underwater constructions: "With my son, pretty far from the shore, we saw a little wall of 5 metres, all of cut stones, posed one on top of the other."

There is no doubt that certain of these secrets, often just glimpsed at, have stimulated the lazy imaginations of prosperous shore-dwellers in the century of positivism. Under their impenetrable shell of science fanaticism, the researchers in fancy hats had fears and fantasies at times quite similar to those of the modest fishermen and farmers of the area. "Sir

10 ■ M. Moon 1977.

Hugh Allan said that it was *a lake without a bottom*, that he had taken a line of 1200 feet (400 m) long and he hadn't been able to find the bottom. He ordered a map in 1870," Mr. Boisvert confided, extracting it from his precious collection of maps. Near Owl's Head, the map bears the legend: "Deepest water; over 600 feet". Another map in his collection, dated 1919, also attributes 600 feet to that spot. This is certainly an erroneous measure of the depth of the water, because official soundings have reached a maximum of only 351 feet (170 m) at Owl's Head. *But the myth is reinforced by this flaw.* The old beliefs about Memphrémagog and Massawippi concerning their unfathomability have, in fact, *been justified* by failed attempts to fathom the bottom in the last years of the nineteenth century. As for the existence of underwater caverns, Mr. Boisvert is certain: "I saw small caverns, three feet (1 m) deep."

The tradition of a subterranean tunnel between Memphrémagog and Massawippi finds, in him, a critical eye, but not an adversary: "If there were a passage, it would have to be in a very deep place, otherwise it would have been discovered. It would be marked by a strong current. The place where I have seen the strongest current is at Lord Island. One day I felt a current in the opposite direction from the lake currents. It was so strong that I wasn't able to come up there. It is also in this part that I found most of my things. It is there also that I saw *the shadows of large fish.*"

The presence of the largest creatures in the water is perceived at the supposed location of the passage between the lakes. Did the coiling movement of Noé Viens' giant snake bring about the "mist" of Lord Island? Or was it one of the long fish mentioned by the garage owner in Stanstead? **[11]**

We must nevertheless return to the surface in order to hear the testimony of Miss Helene Hicks, director of the Red Cross of Essex County, Vermont, for which we are indebted to the historian Emely Nelson. In view of the importance of the report, authenticated in her hand, we publish it in Appendix 3.

According to her testimony, on a clear hot night in 1972, *below Owl's Head mountain "where the water is very deep"*, a creature with *a horse's head* and a long neck, "*with very red eyes*", dived beneath Miss Hicks's boat, causing it to rock, and swamping the motor. She could distinguish, on the back of the beast "something like enormous scales" – reminiscent of the description of the monster of Lake Saint-François made by Mr. Toussaint Dostie. Strangely, "the water around the creature seemed to be iridescent."

The skin of Nessie is sometimes described as iridescent, covered with a sort of slime. **[12]** In size, this monster of Memphrémagog resembles Champ. In this 1972 sighting, the horse-headed serpent of 1850 reappears, proving some continuity of belief and the use of a traditional monster-imagery to interpret some unexplained and frightening experiences on the lake. Modernism is nevertheless present in the detail of the jagged dinosaur-like dorsal ridge. The water-horse had united with Godzilla. The legendary monster seems to continue to be interested in small boats, whether they are Indian canoes or modern motorboats. Even if its thirst for blood is, we hope,

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11 ■ The "cow-headed fish" with a flat snout, seen by this same mechanic, might have, as one of its origins, the *barbot*, whose snub-nose earns it the name 'Bullhead'. [See also Note 3 on p95.

Mr. Boisvert has assured us of the presence of this voracious fish in Lake Memphrémagog. Isn't it interesting that according to Mr. Simard's statements, the Massawippi lake-serpent has a "head like a barbot"? But the "cow-headed fish" is only an approximation to a barbot, an imaginary hybrid like the 'horse-headed serpent'.

See also Chapter 4, Section 4, on the sea-cows of the Saint-Lawrence.

12 ■ F.W. Holiday 1968.

appeased, its haunts are the same, in the 350 feet of water "*under Owl's Head, his cavernous home.*" **[13]**

1:9

LAKE BROMPTON: CHAMP'S YOUNGER BROTHER

Persistent rumours among the fishermen of the city of Richmond led us to Lake Brompton. This expanse of water of moderate importance is situated in the same zone as Lake Memphrémagog. The first approaches we made to the shore-dwellers revealed at once the interest they had in the phenomenon and the difficulty we would have in obtaining descriptions. An understandable difficulty as there are no communities on the immediate shores of the lake. We therefore had to knock on the doors of the seasonal cottage dwellers, who were often not at home. The few locals maintained a legitimate scepticism towards strangers, whose investigations might throw Brompton into a bad light, or so they thought. Oh, tourism! What mysterious things are done in your name! Nonetheless, on this lake among the Eastern Townships, according to the believers, glides a silhouette with which our inquiry at Pohénégamook had familiarised us: the "*overturned boat*".

Two years earlier, in 1979, it had been observed through a telescope: a "large back which went in and out of the water... the part which emerged was about 8 feet long." This "big green fish" was the object of conversation among fishermen, even though for outsiders silence is the rule. "The people at the lake know what's going on, but nobody speaks about it to strangers," as a relative at Richmond confided to us. However, these facts go back for some time. Mr. Couture, a resident since 1951 or 1952, assured us that "People had always spoken of the monster. We haven't seen anything except his back. Some people said that it could be a whale." We thought of what Robert Turcotte at Saint-François had described as being a "round-backed whale."

As well as a monster of similar shape, this lake shares another characteristic with some other lakes in our investigation: the opacity of its waters. We met Claude, a young diver, in front of his home at Saint-Denis, near Brompton, a few steps from the water. He said: "At 30 or 40 feet (9–12 m), you'd be lucky if you could see as far as the end of your hand. That's because of the mud and the pollution in the water. Down in this gloomy world without light there are said to be enormous fish. They are said to stay 60 feet down (18 m) and never come to the surface. A diver friend told me the same thing about Lake Memphrémagog. There are said to be fish six and seven feet long in that lake. He told me that 'if people knew that there were such large fish at the bottom, they would never go swimming here'. These are *prehistoric fish*, like trout, with the mouth underneath like a shark. They stay in the darkness, and with their mouths they rummage through the lake bottom. They are herbivores."

One of these "fish of the great deep" was even said to have

13 ■ We draw the attention of sailing enthusiasts to the oddity of the deepest part of Lake Memphrémagog, below the Owl's Head. According to a witness, Marcelle N. : "Everything goes mad there. It's freezing. From a sailing point of view, the people are lost... You have to keep tacking (turning) the whole time. Even in motorboats you get problems. The cold comes down from the mountain. The colour of the water isn't the same. Fishermen know that spot because there the lake falls away to 300, 350 feet. There's a wall. It is a limit."

Therefore the monster appears on a frontier, just as the "Horse's Head" seen by Olivier Garneau appeared in a natural 'gateway' between two islands [see p106].

been caught and "the newspapers have spoken about them". But this plural is often replaced by a singular. Many residents believe there is just one giant, grey trout in the lake. According to a group of adolescents, a diver met this trout during a night dive. They repeat: "He said that if people knew that there were fish like that, they would never go swimming here." In 1979 a fisherman from Drummondville and his friends are said to have seen an enormous fish warming itself in the sun: "He was half out of the water," he said. "He was more than 4 feet long; my friends had to steer our boat to one side. The fish submerged itself in the water; they thought that it was the big grey... It warmed itself before the ice came."

We note that this fish-like back, *thought* to be like that of a great trout, was seen in the autumn of the same year as the "big green fish". Could it be the same animal? Everywhere, an unknown form is understood to be the largest species of fish that the lake contains: "*maskinongé*" at the lake of the same name and at Trois-Lacs at Asbestos, "big pike" at Saint-Rémi and at Memphrémagog. The "explanations" which people gave are also the same: the "log in mid-stream" of Lake Aylmer is equally the account of a fisherman from Brompton. For him, what the witnesses must have seen in the telescope is nothing other than an "enormous log six feet long which was adrift". However, his wife told us of the anxiety people had in navigating on the lake.

But isn't this "log" one of the appearances of the beast so often described during this inquiry as a "dead tree which came to life"? And, when a witness identified the monster of Brompton as a "boat which had floated into the middle of the lake", isn't this the back of the "overturned boat" which is taken for wreckage, keel upward? At Loch Ness, in 1967, a lock-keeper saw Nessie emerge from the water in the form of a "sort of overturned big boat". **[1]** The "phantom vessel" of Lake Brompton may have the same origin.

Each in its turn – boat, rowing-boat, tree trunk, and grey trout – the secret of the lake clothes itself in more and more extraordinary appearances. Mrs. Pauline Robitaille lives at the point where the lake discharges. Every summer she rents her stylish white lakeside cottages, the upkeep of which frequently keeps her working in the open air. She showed us a place, between two cottages, which gives a long view onto the lake.

"At the beginning of June 1976," she told us, "before the cottages were opened, I went down to the lakeshore every morning to prepare the houses. One day I was in my bathing suit with my wheelbarrow, when I heard a turmoil. There were enormous waves and 250 feet (45 m) from the shore I saw this thing. It was long, long, at least six feet (2 m), if not more, grey-coloured, and with an evil-looking head. You might have said it was *a horse* with something like a moustache. The snout was pointed and it had something like ears. It had three humps and a tail like a fish. The tail had two tips and it went quickly, like a whale. I saw it arch its back." She undulated her hand. "My husband said that it was a sub coming to the surface. I didn't go back to swim. The first time I had a canoe. Hah! if I had known. *I've lived here since 1946.* I had never seen it before.

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[1] ■ N. Witchell 1975.

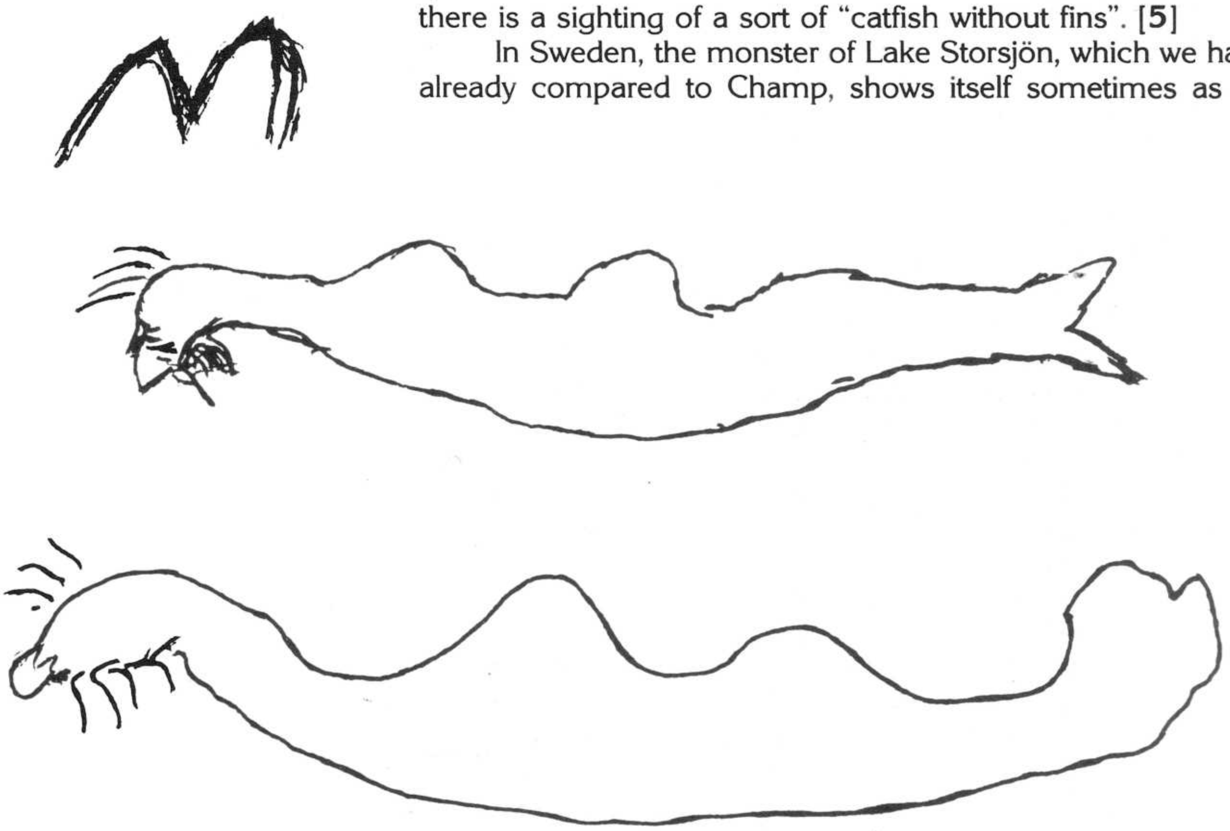
"In June 1979 my tenants – Mr. and Mrs. Martel, from Montréal – called to their neighbour, Pierre Adam: 'Look what's happening.' He came up to find me and said: *'I saw the tail go under. It was like a kind of grey camel in the water. The head was pointed and bearded. It was like a grey camel with humps.'* I spoke about this with my brother-in-law. Its portrait was in *Reader's Digest*, except that my animal was grey. They called it a *sea-horse.*"

We met our witness's brother-in-law, who found the article in question for us. Surprise! It was a condensed version of a study by Brian Vachon of the "monster of Lake Champlain", with an artist's impression of Champ as a rust-coloured horse-serpent. Its muzzle had two barbs; the "moustaches" seen by Mrs. Robitaille. [2]

Another probable close relation to the Brompton monster is the "*serpent of Lake Massawippi*", described to us by Paul Simard: "six, seven feet in length with *the head of a barbot, a catfish.*" The size is of the same order of that of the Brompton monster, reinforced by the comparison with the catfish and the "barbot". The barbot [3] and the catfish both have, in the vicinity of the mouth, a characteristic set of barbs. These form "moustaches" or long crests, four on either side of the jaws of the monster, which Mrs. Robitaille featured in her first sketch. The illustrator of Champ in the *Reader's Digest* was content to draw two long sets of whiskers at the corners of the lips of his sea-horse: "his head is decked with moustaches which are reminiscent of those of the catfish". [4] The *Silurus* family of fishes, of which the catfish is a member, are implicated in the question of the identities of lake monsters. At Loch Ness even, there is a sighting of a sort of "catfish without fins". [5]

In Sweden, the monster of Lake Storsjön, which we have already compared to Champ, shows itself sometimes as an

Two attempts by Mrs Robitaille to sketch the moustachioed monster she saw in Lake Brompton, with a detail of its tail [top].



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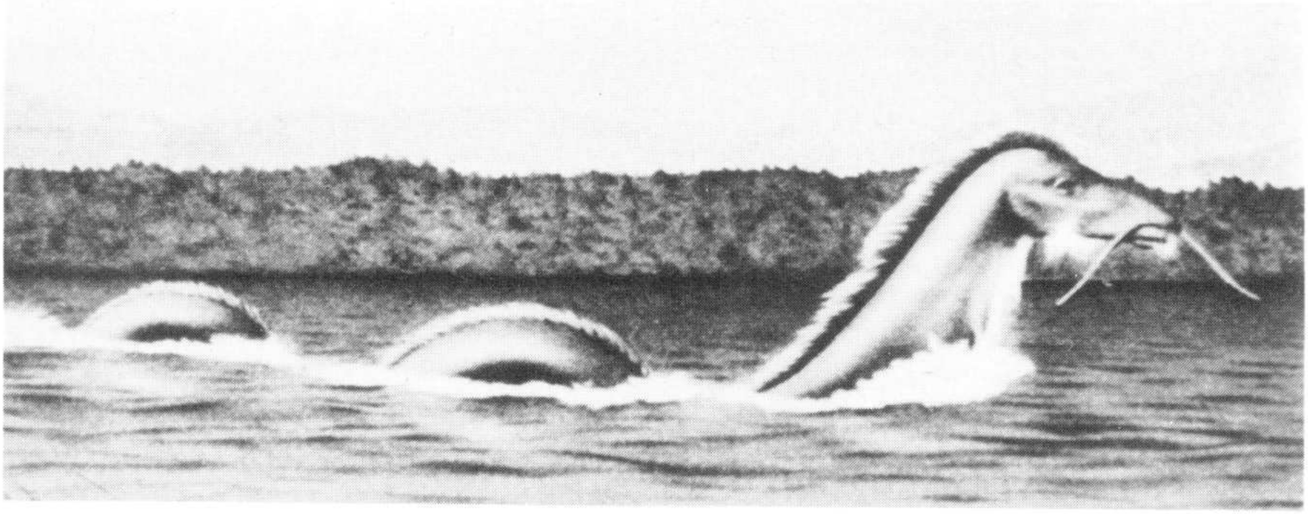
[2] Brian Vachon, 'Le monstre du lac Champlain,' in *Sélection* (Reader's Digest), November 1978.

[3] According to Bergeron *"Barbote"* ="'Bearded one', a river fish with a moustache."

Barbot, however, is also the "usual name of the loach" (*Dictionnaire Larousse*). The mention of "catfish" just after the barbot shows that Mr. Simard was aiming more at an approximation than at a definite identity when he adorned his "serpent" with a "barbot head". The wattles on these three fish are the determining element for their choice as comparisons.

[4] Brian Vachon, 'Le monstre du lac Champlain,' in *Sélection* (Reader's Digest), November 1978.

[5] J. Berton 1977.



An artist's impression of Champ, which Mrs Robitaille identified as very like the creature she saw in Lake Brompton. [Courtesy of Reader's Digest, © 1978]

"overturned boat", sometimes as a horse with many humps. [**6**] Some people have wanted to define him as a giant catfish. But Mrs Robitaille's beast has little to do with catfishes: the creature she drew is a lake variant of the 'sea-horse'. [**7**]

One thing is certain: the beast of Lake Brompton haunts analogous places to those which are attributed to his more robust fellows. There are many points of resemblance between the beasts of Lake Brompton and Lake Massawippi. The first is said to have "three humps"; Champ, according to his model, has "two or three humps". For Mrs. Robitaille "it went quickly"; Champ "moved very rapidly for his size". [**8**] At Champlain the monster is said to have the disquieting habit of charging at boats. Thus in 1939 he frightened a couple of fishermen near Rouses Point. [**9**] The "serpent" of Memphrémagog likewise possesses this instinct, as was confirmed by the misadventure of Mrs. Hicks: "*It started to come for the boat.*" [**10**]

This 'Loch Ness' to the west of Estrie has a setting well suited to the monster, which it seems to hide in its dark waters. Claude, the diver, told us: "This lake is an oddity. You can sometimes drop from 40 to 150 feet (from 12 m to 45 m). You descend to 100 feet (30 m) and the measuring line gets hooked. There are said to be caves in Brompton. My brother told me. One day when he went down, he panicked. He followed the cliff, as it doesn't go down too sharply. Suddenly, he found the rock overhead. He came up very quickly, and never went down again. It is at this place that the lake is at its deepest."

This place is said to be the scene of very odd phenomena: "I do a lot of sailing. At the place where you see the little mountain (the deepest point), the winds come from every side. We turned around there and many thoughts went through my head: if this is the place where the monster is, we run the risk of having our toes tickled. We've dubbed this corner *'the Bermuda triangle'*. You have to be a good sailor at this place, a good helmsman."

The place indicated by Claude, at the bottom of the "little mountain", was again referred to during the course of our later interviews. It is called the Indian Rock or Big Red Rock: a legendary place, in front of which the water descends to its greatest depths, 139 feet (42 m). Many people cite this as the haunt of the monster. According to Mr. Couture: "The lake is deepest at Indian Rock; people say that it's more than 300 feet

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6 ■ P. Costello 1975.

7 ■ Bernard Heuvelmans has studied the dossier on catfishes relative to different African aquatic monsters with gripping "tentacles", notably the *"Migas"* of the High Congo which used to be interpreted as "octopuses", but which now are thought to be manatees or sea-cows [*"lamantins"*] by the Belgian officials. (Heuvelmans 1978)

8 ■ Brian Vachon, 'Le monstre du lac Champlain,' in *Sélection* (Reader's Digest), November 1978.

9 ■ *ibidem.*

10 ■ See Appendix 4.

(100 m). Some say that you can never touch the bottom." Mrs. Robitaille's brother- in-law told us that at Indian Rock "a cord of 600 feet (180 m) will keep going. The rocks are jagged. There must be a chain of asbestos rocks; the water is black, black."

Lake Brompton's Indian Rock constitutes a location similar to Owl's Head at Lake Memphrémagog: maximum depths, caverns, supposed dwelling place of the monster, difficulties for sailors, and also an island – here at Brompton it is Hooper Island. William L. Hooper (1855–1918), an electrical engineer born in Nova Scotia, built his dwelling on the island which bears his name. On the island he wrote the *Legend of the Fire Spirit*, based upon the stories of an old Huron woman. Gerard Dionne, of Sherbrooke, had access to the work in manuscript form. He told us that this long poem had been written around 1900, and prose extracts had been published in the *Tribune* of 29 August 1981. [**11**]

One of these stories concerns the construction of a gigantic mask out of asbestos-cloth baskets by a Huron colony fishing salmon on *"Antoné Outunwitti"* (Lake Brompton). Twenty-five women and young girls lit fires in the baskets, held by cables over the precipices of Indian Rock. The ensemble, hoisted above the lake, had the appearance of a "horrible, enormous, gigantic face spitting fire from its mouth and neck, suspended in the heavens in the West". Six Algonkin warriors, who spent the night on Hooper Island, were terrified by the flaming apparition and were finally engulfed by a lake storm which came up "as if by enchantment". *These unexpected squalls are a constant factor on our monster lakes.* You find them at Lake Aylmer as well as at Lake Brompton. Even if Hooper was content to embellish the description of the *"smoke signal hill"* [**12**], his poem, all the same, introduces yet another element, often present in the course of this inquiry: luminous phenomena in the haunts of the beast, as in the case of the legendary creature at Saint-François.

Lake Brompton is a strange zone, featuring earthquakes and other aberrant phenomena, including a *rain of frogs*, which the grandmother of one of our informants is said to have experienced: "We couldn't find any of them; the lake has swallowed them all." The term 'Bermuda Triangle' for the waters in front of Indian Rock will no doubt inspire ufologists and other enthusiasts of these "damned" – *in the Fortean sense* – subjects. Canadian followers of the works of Charles Berlitz, such as Hugh Cochrane, who discovered a 'Bermuda Triangle' at the mouth of Lake Ontario [**13**], could profitably study the lakes of Estrie. The wide range of phenomena which they believe they have brought to light are found here in miniature, at least in the minds of the shore-dwellers and as an interpretation of nature. Mysterious underground connections are said to unify Lake Brompton to other bodies of water in the area.

One of our witnesses from Richmond remembers that his grandfather, from the village of Racine, had spoken to him of an *underground passage*, at least a mile long, between Brompton and the "Lac-des-Vases" (Lake Rouche) in the forest, and the monster is said to have travelled that route. However, this great stream is normally linked to Brompton by a small

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11 ■ 'L'esprit cracheur de feu du lac enchanté,' in *La Tribune* 29 August 1981.

12 ■ A similar one existed in Lake Massawippi, near Ayer's Cliff. The smoke allowed the Amerindians to signal an enemy's advance.

13 ■ H. Cochrane 1981.
Cochrane calls the place where Lake Ontario opens into the Saint Lawrence, the "Marysburgh Vortex".

brook. Why would tradition suppose that the monster would need a more discreet path? Lake Rouche is closer to another lake – Lake Bowker – which has no known connection with Lake Brompton. *There are also rumours about a "monster of Lake Bowker".* The underground passage, it would seem, was initially situated between Lakes Rouche and Bowker. In any case, Brompton and Bowker, taken together, would furnish us with another pair of monster lakes like Memphrémagog and Massawippi. Like them, Brompton connects with the *Saint-François River,* whose waters, formerly fertile with salmon, authenticate the great link between most of the monster lakes of the Eastern Townships.

We returned to Brompton to close our inquiry. As with other great silences, confidences, once liberated, could not readily stop themselves. A young fisherman informed us that "the monster is said to have been in the *bog*, the swampy part of the lake, where people catch big trout". Like Nessie and Champ, the monster of Brompton appears to like *both* the great depths and muddy waters. Nessie has also been observed "in the swamps bordering Urquhart Bay." **[14]** Champ, according to certain reports, hibernates near swampy rivers at the north end of the lake. **[15]** "Half-hidden in the slime": this is our final image of the monster whose presence is always haunting the thoughts of the shore-dwellers. One witness confirmed: "In the evening, in the twilight, there is a kind of fear of this thing. That is the moment when fishermen tell the story, as they go to fish the great trout."

1:10

ASHUAPS: THE MONSTER OF LAKE SAINT–JEAN

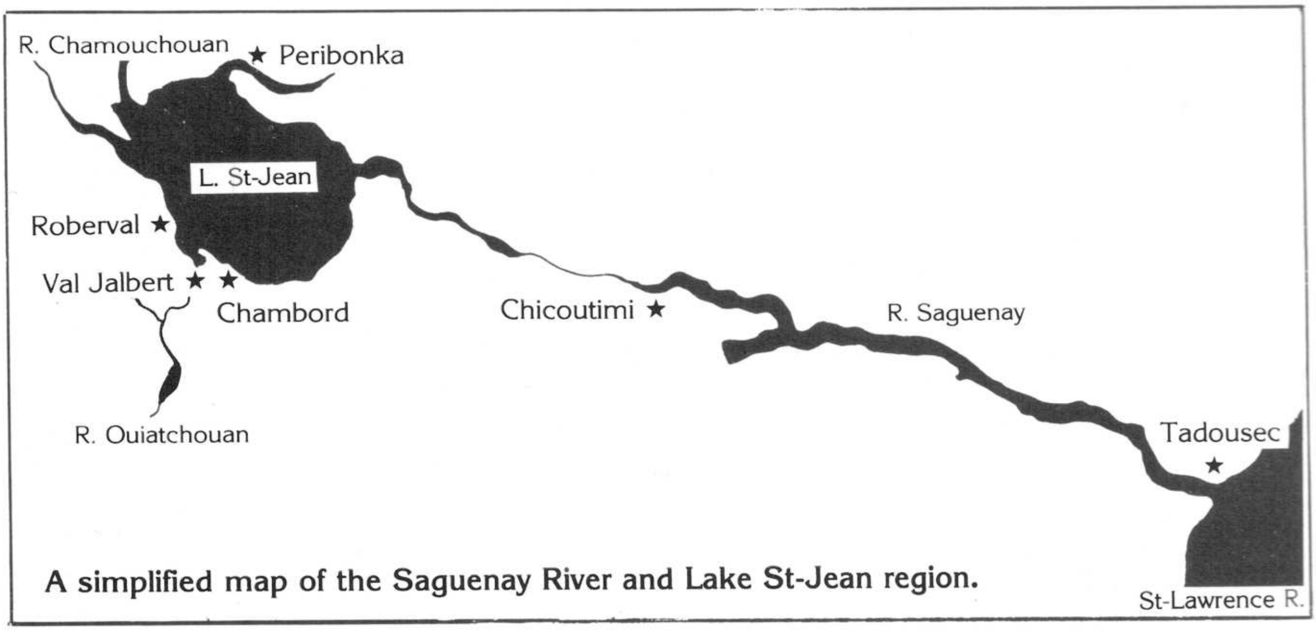
We got to Lake Saint-Jean in December, a season free from the influx of tourists. Rumours came to us on the subject of "something" unusual in this expanse, so vast that its discoverers in the 17th century had baptised it "*la mer douce*" ("the freshwater sea"). Before us, as far as the eye could see, was an indigo surface, irregularly trimmed with white. The water freezes, and one can hear the steady sound of the ice breaking up against the shore.

This peaceful immobility had, it seemed, exhausted the appetite of the curious. In fact, since 1975 and peaking in 1980, the newspapers of the lake's region had continuously reported observations of the monster – *l' Étoile du Lac,* the *Progrès du Saguenay,* the *Lake Saint-Jean*, and the *Journal de Québec*, all gave it headlines – with photographs of witnesses, and their interviews. Then there was the inevitable backlash: sarcastic commentaries, "specialists" setting the record straight, humorous cartoons and jeers.

This publicity stimulated the witnesses of this bizarre phenomenon at first, but the sarcastic tone of a second wave of articles made them all fall silent. Today, unlike at Pohénégamook, where the existence of Ponik as a phenomenon

14 ■ P. Costello 1975.

15 ■ One of the sites from which the Saint-François monster was observed, opposite the old priest's house, overlooked "plenty of mud", according to Mrs. Roy, who thinks the creature is a "mud fish".



A simplified map of the Saguenay River and Lake St-Jean region.

is accepted by the quasi-totality of the population, at Lake Saint-Jean belief in the monster constitutes a sort of sub-culture among the few whites who haven't been discouraged by sarcasm and all of the Indians on the Ouiatchouan Reservation, on the edge of the lake. It is necessary to describe the social climate to the reader in order to express our sincere gratitude to our witnesses. It required a great deal of trust to bring these ridiculed accounts to our attention.

The first among them was Ghislain Gagnon, director of the important zoo at Saint-Félicien, to the north of the Ashuapmouchouan (also Chamouchouan) River, in the region of Lake Saint-Jean-Ouest. According to Mr. Gagnon, the first sightings coincided with the escape of some of the sea lions from his park. These California sea lions sought refuge in the lake and all were caught except one, which is said to have known how to adapt to the glacial waters of the lake. The swimming silhouette of this pinniped would be able to pass for that of a serpent, a form given to the monster of Lake Saint-Jean by its observers.

One single discrepancy plagued Mr. Gagnon: a sea lion can measure about eight feet (2.4 m) at its maximum, which is far from 30 feet (10 m), or even 100 feet (38 m), mentioned in descriptions of the monster made in 1975 and 1980. "In any case, if this is not a sea lion, it is surely *something*", he said. At Saint-Félicien, in the evenings, the story of the sea lions is used in the same way as that of the curate's sturgeons at Pohénégamook in the armoury of ready-made explanations. In fact, according to our hotel-keeper, born in the region, people were talking about the monster at least 30 years ago. When he was young, he remembers having heard that people had sighted it in the Ashuapmouchouan River. The frequency of sightings of the beast in this swiftly running water led journalists to baptise it "Ashuaps", a contraction of that river's name.

We were unsuccessful as far as the Indians of the Ouiatchouan Reservation were concerned. Their silence was not born out of incredulity, but from fear that their confidence would be abused. Silence can be one of the last ramparts of sincerity.

However, this monster had been seen by others, including a group from Montréal, in July 1977. When these people directed their boat towards Grass-Snake Island (l'*Île-aux-Couleuvres*] three miles (5 km) from Roberval, they saw a sort of "*black tide, in the middle of which something seemed to be angry*". [**1**] In 1978, the "monster of Lake Saint-Jean" was seen twice in the Ashuapmouchouan River, which empties into the lake. The two principal witnesses are Marcel Tardif and his wife, of Roberval. They received us amiably and agreed to speak to us about their experience.

Marcel Tardiff. [© Michel Meurger]

They had parked their car near the city's filtration plant on Scott Point. "As it began to get dark in the evening," they said, "the lake was as calm as a mirror." Mrs. Tardif saw something and cried: "Look, Pierre, something's coming! It's lifting itself three feet out of the water and it's all black." Mr. Tardif added: "It wriggled and twisted to both sides... it didn't go very quickly." Madame Tardif continued: "It was something shiny, wet, and muddy blue." Mr. Tardif improved on this: "It was about 50 or 60 feet long (from 15 to 18 m). As it approached, instead of inclining itself towards the back, it dived forwards."

According to the Tardifs, the animal could not have been a sea lion. "If it had been a sea lion, it would have dived. The animal that we saw moved with regularity." And this is where the Indians come onto the scene. The *same day* that the Tardifs saw the animal, "something" overturned the canoe containing an Indian, Michel Verreault, his wife and his little girl, Julie. Across from the reservation, a mysterious force lifted their canoe. Julie was thrown into the water and her mother succeeded in saving her. But the lake had been calm: what had happened? [**2**] Mrs. Tardif recalled a story of a similar incident which happened "long ago." "An Indian family left their reservation at Pointe Bleue to paddle directly to Péribonka, across the lake, but something overturned their canoe, with their furs, and drowned them. Ever since then, Indians prefer to go around, following the shoreline."

This had been told to her by Thommy Nepton, one of the few Indians who agreed to talk to us. "Yes," he said, "the Indians are afraid of Lake Saint-Jean." [**3**] What's more, their brother tribe, the Montagnais, know of the creature, and keep silent. Mrs. Tardif commented: "They don't speak, they're afraid of the ridicule of the Whites. An Indian once put his hand on my shoulder and said to me: *'Don't get worked up about what you see. I've seen others'*." Mr. Nepton declared: "What you've heard about, we believe it." His wife added: "Journalists say that we are savages."

Without the testimony of the Indians, many of the mysteries of Lake Saint-Jean will remain forever unknown. They call it *"Piekeagami"*, the flat lake. A Jesuit father, Jean Dequen, discovered it in 1647. [**4**] Since then, its dimensions have been measured: 28 miles long (45 km), 21 miles wide (34 km), and 206 feet (63 m) at its deepest point. What more do we know? Shore-dwellers believe that Pointe Chambord, where the group from Montréal saw Ashuaps in 1977, is a strange place. The bottom drops abruptly. Mr. Tardif adds: "At Chambord there are salt-water streams coming into the lake, *underground conduits from the sea* which empty into the Lake

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1 ■ Michelle Coudé, 'Qu'a-t-il vu dans le lac Saint-Jean, un monstre?' in *Le Journal de Québec* 27 July 1977.

This "black angry water" is most likely a natural phenomenon similar to the "boiling explosion" preceding Ogopogo's surfacings. Some witnesses have observed a "dark part" in these troubled waters. (Moon 1977).

2 ■ Jean-Claude Saint-Pierre, 'Qu'est-ce qui a projeté leur canot hors de l'eau?' in *Le Journal du Saguenay – Lac Saint-Jean*, N° 21, 8 August 1978.

3 ■ Jean-Claude Saint-Pierre, 'Thommy Nepton: il y a un fond de vérité dans tout cela,' in *Le Journal du Saguenay – Lac Saint-Jean*, N° 21, 8 August 1978.

4 ■ V. Tremblay 1968.

Lake Saint–Jean.
[© Michel Meurger.]

Saint-Jean. The lake connects with the Gulf of Saint-Lawrence..." Madame Tardif added: "School children have found bones and enormous dinosaur teeth at Chambord". This prehistoric stratum strengthens the opinion of those who believe that the lair of some beast of primitive times lies in the lower depths, under the Point. Behind these stories is the image of a lost world of caves inhabited by monsters, and of enormous skeletons bleaching on the beaches. The final touch: "The monster was said to have been seen at the *'Fairy's Hole'* (*'Trou de la Fee'*), near the Métabetchouan River," said Mr. Tardif.

A correspondent to *l'Étoile du Lac* embellished this information in a doubtful tone. [**5**] We are dealing here with an authentic popular tradition: the cavern called the 'Fairy's Hole', at Desbiens, is a curiously hollowed vault in a granite cliff, among the oldest rocks on earth. People have vainly sought a way up. Is it not exceptional that the hole is situated above a river which flows into Lake Saint-Jean? Roch Poitevin, an amateur spelunker, told us that it has been known to the locals for a very long time. During the last war, three draft-dodgers hid themselves in the Fairy's Hole. "They lowered themselves down with a rope, *at Chambord*."

CRYPTO-
GEOGRAPHY

Chambord? Is there a legend of a subterranean passage going up from the lake to the 'Fairy's Hole' at this Point? A mysterious corridor, like the one which unifies the great underwater cavern of Pohénégamook with the waters under the "Montagne de la Croix" at the mouth of the Boucanée River? Were these fairies, who have given their name to the strange hole at Desbiens, and who are said to have gone flying over the abyss, connected with the lake serpent? These questions are still without answers, but we may still suppose the existence of an obscure region associated with the monster of Lake Saint-Jean because of the resurgence of the Val Jalbert River from its underground passage near by, and the wells and caverns of the Saguenay. Does the existence of this underground labyrinth

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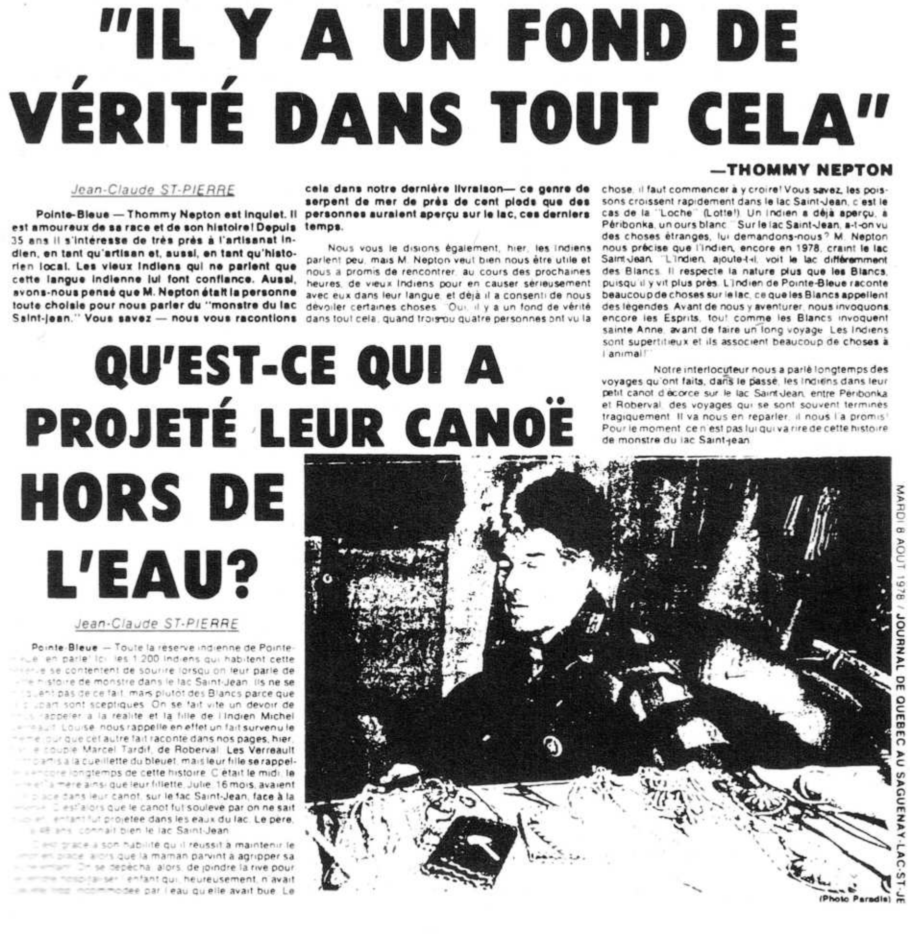
5 ■ "Un chercheur nous écrit" (sic), 'La présence du monstre dans le lac est connue des savants depuis 1647,' in *Étoile du lac* 23 August 1978.

6 ■ See Chapter 2, p151, for a mention of a dragon inhabiting a "Fairies' Rock" in France.

imply an older layer – one in which the present lake monster was interpreted as a cave-dwelling dragon of European importation, and the associate of a fairy. [**6**]

According to the Tardifs, Ashuaps is to be seen *after* the annual cross-lake swimming contest. Perhaps the motors of the accompanying boats disturb him? In keeping with our age, some people see Ashuaps as a technological creation. When he was seen in 1977, some people believed "that a guy had constructed *a little submarine* and that he was trying it out". In the same spirit, at Saint-Félicien, in August 1978, according to the Tardifs, students "had made a giant robot which came out of the water all lit up when it was completely dark". The monster, a mechanical Ashuaps, 40 feet (12 m) long [**7**], is an example of the totemisation of the beast of the lake, and of a general process of technologising: flesh is becoming steel; the product of prodigy is reworked into an artificial device.

Perhaps there is also a haven for the devil of the rural communities between the serpent of the Montagnais and the Ashuaps of the newspapers. The name of the place of the sighting in 1977, Grass-snake Island, is interesting: at Saguenay, the devil is said to have appeared in *the form of a grass-snake*. Significantly, the name of the forbidden island in Lake Okanagan, the lair of Ogopogo, is Rattlesnake Island. Grass-snake Island, in Lake Saint-Jean, might have been some sort of sanctuary for the Indians, transformed into a devil's island. [**8**] In any case, Ashuaps doesn't fear modernity. Soon he will be integrated into the mythology of the UFO. In fact, at the same time that the monster was revelling in the lake, in August 1978, M.R. Paré, the "aviation pioneer of the Saguenay", was said to have perceived a UFO above Alma. [**9**]



"IL Y A UN FOND DE VÉRITÉ DANS TOUT CELA"

—THOMMY NEPTON

Jean-Claude ST-PIERRE

Pointe-Bleue — Thommy Nepton est inquiet. Il est amoureux de sa race et de son histoire! Depuis 35 ans il s'intéresse de très près à l'artisanat indien, en tant qu'artisan et, aussi, en tant qu'historien local. Les vieux Indiens qui ne parlent que cette langue indienne lui font confiance. Aussi, avons-nous pensé que M. Nepton était la personne toute choisie pour nous parler du "monstre du lac Saint-jean." Vous savez — nous vous racontions cela dans notre dernière livraison— ce genre de serpent de mer de près de cent pieds que des personnes auraient aperçu sur le lac, ces derniers temps.

Nous vous le disions également, hier, les Indiens parlent peu, mais M. Nepton veut bien nous être utile et nous a promis de rencontrer, au cours des prochaines heures, de vieux Indiens pour en causer sérieusement avec eux dans leur langue, et déjà il a consenti de nous dévoiler certaines choses. "Oui, il y a un fond de vérité dans tout cela, quand trois ou quatre personnes ont vu la chose, il faut commencer à y croire! Vous savez, les poissons croissent rapidement dans le lac Saint-Jean, c'est le cas de la "Loche" (Lotte!). Un Indien a déjà aperçu, à Péribonka, un ours blanc." Sur le lac Saint-Jean, a-t-on vu des choses étranges, lui demandons-nous? M. Nepton nous précise que l'Indien, encore en 1978, craint le lac Saint-Jean. "L'Indien, ajoute-t-il, voit le lac différemment des Blancs. Il respecte la nature plus que les Blancs, puisqu'il y vit plus près. L'Indien de Pointe-Bleue raconte beaucoup de choses sur le lac, ce que les Blancs appellent des légendes. Avant de nous y aventurer, nous invoquons encore les Esprits, tout comme les Blancs invoquent sainte Anne, avant de faire un long voyage. Les Indiens sont supertitieux et ils associent beaucoup de choses à l'animal!"

Notre interlocuteur nous a parlé longtemps des voyages qu'ont faits, dans le passé, les Indiens dans leur petit canot d'écorce sur le lac Saint-Jean, entre Péribonka et Roberval, des voyages qui se sont souvent terminés tragiquement. Il va nous en reparler, il nous l'a promis! Pour le moment, ce n'est pas lui qui va rire de cette histoire de monstre du lac Saint-jean.

QU'EST-CE QUI A PROJETÉ LEUR CANOË HORS DE L'EAU?

Jean-Claude ST-PIERRE

Pointe-Bleue — Toute la réserve indienne de Pointe-[illegible]ue en parle! Ici, les 1 200 Indiens qui habitent cette [illegible]erve se contentent de sourire lorsqu'on leur parle de [illegible]e histoire de monstre dans le lac Saint-Jean. Ils ne se [illegible]uent pas de ce fait, mais plutôt des Blancs parce que [illegible]part sont sceptiques. On se fait vite un devoir de [illegible] rappeler à la réalité et la fille de l'Indien Michel [illegible]eault, Louise, nous rappelle en effet un fait survenu le [illegible]me jour que cet autre fait raconté dans nos pages, hier, [illegible]e couple Marcel Tardif, de Roberval. Les Verreault [illegible] partis à la cueillette du bleuet, mais leur fille se rappel[illegible] encore longtemps de cette histoire. C'était le midi, le [illegible] et la mère ainsi que leur fillette, Julie, 16 mois, avaient [illegible] place dans leur canot, sur le lac Saint-Jean, face à la [illegible]. C'est alors que le canot fut soulevé par on ne sait [illegible] enfant fut projetée dans les eaux du lac. Le père, [illegible] 48 ans, connaît bien le lac Saint-Jean.

C'est grâce à son habileté qu'il réussit à maintenir le [illegible] en place, alors que la maman parvint à agripper sa [illegible] enfant. On se dépêcha, alors, de joindre la rive pour [illegible] hospitaliser l'enfant qui, heureusement, n'avait [illegible] incommodée par l'eau qu'elle avait bue. Le

(Photo Paradis)

MARDI 8 AOUT 1978 / JOURNAL DE QUEBEC AU SAGUENAY-LAC-ST-JE

The story of the canoe disaster, in *Journal du Saguenay, Lac St–Jean* **8 August 1978, with a picture of Thommy Nepton.**

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7 ■ Jean-Claude Saint-Pierre, 'Le monstre du lac Saint-Jean a ses admirateurs, meme s'il est d'acier,' in *Le Journal du Saguenay – Lac Saint-Jean* 10 August 1978.

8 ■ M. Moon 1977.

This hypothesis is strengthened by the Amerindian name for this island, "Manitou Ministuk", the *"island of evil spirits"*. The engineer Normandin, in his 1732 report, writes of a "broad island... which is called Grass-snake Island. This insect is in *such great numbers on the island* that the Savages dare not go near it for fear of them. However, they say that *these sorts of snakes*, though *very large*, are not at all wicked..." (*Saguenayensia*, vol.4, N° 2, 1962.)

The Jesuit Charlevoix had already noted in his *Journal*: "The serpents do not cause the people any fright. The bones and the skins are greatly used by mountebanks and sorcerers for added prestige... " (Charlevoix 1744.)

Is it not strange that Ashuaps, described by the Tardifs as "a species of snake" (*Journal de Québec* August 1978), had chosen to surface in front of the visitors from Montréal, in 1977, on the shore of an island doubly notorious for its evil spirits and abundance of snakes?

9 ■ *Le Journal du Saguenay – Lac Saint-Jean* 10 August 1978.

The Reverend Dr Donald Omand exorcising Loch Ness on 2 June 1973. [© F.W. Holiday / Fortean Picture Library.]

Already a novel celebrates Ashuaps – the ultimate consecration. In his *Isle au Dragon*, Jacques Godbout jokingly describes how the Sports Association of Lake Saint-Jean asks the swimmers entering the annual crossing to sign a declaration "in which the athletes swear that, in case of an accident attributable to the dragon of Lake Saint-Jean, no complaint can be made". The writer notes also that "from all of the churches of the area, from Alma to Val Jalbert, the priests of the fourteen surrounding parishes came every morning to pour a little sacred water into the lake". **[10]**

An exorcism worthy of this was recently celebrated at Loch Ness. **[11]** With the help of the press, Desbiens might become another *Port Henry*, or Ashuaps could become the Québecois rival of the American Champ, and model for illuminated statues in all of the windows and on all of the signposts. Then why not, after the novel, the comic book? A fairy from the 'Fairy's Hole' could be advantageously represented by one of Saguenay's beauties, with jet-black hair. And wouldn't a new Barbarella hide her UFO hangar in the depths of Val Jalbert?

These fantasies of the age of neon shouldn't make us forget the original myth, the informants, and the silence of the Indian. There is, in this corner of the Saguenay, a mine for the folklorist, the cryptozoologist, and the simple enthusiast of monsters. But you journalists! Please stop building your houses of cards, of guile, and of puns, on the foundations of racism!

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10 ■ J. Godbout 1976.

11 ■ This took place in June 1973. See Chapter 6 of Marc Alexander's account of the exorcist Rev. Dr. Donald Omand. (Alexander 1978.)

1:11

THE 'HORSE'S HEAD' OF BLUE-SEA LAKE

Our research at Blue-Sea Lake, in Gatineau County (Outaouais), near Maniwaki, held the greatest surprise in our inquiry. At dusk, Mrs. Pascal Barbe, aged 78, spoke to us at the grocery store about the phenomenon of the lake. She spoke very freely, familiarly even, which struck us from the moment of our arrival at the shop. To our question about the existence of a monster in Blue-Sea Lake, Nathalie Barbe exclaimed: "Ah! the *Horse's Head!*". Here was a name familiar from Lakes Pohénégamook, Saint-Jean, and Okanagan, and proof of the homogeneity of the belief.

Under the beams decorated with fishing trophies, among them a big *maskinongé,* Mrs. Barbe recalled that "his head resembled a horse's head. They called it the 'Horse's Head' or a 'serpent-with-a-horse's-head'. It was long; almost six or seven feet (2 m). It was black. People leaving church on a Sunday, and children leaving school, saw it; this was around 1913." Nathalie Barbe added a very interesting detail to her account: "It looked like a sea-horse, but on a larger scale." [1]

Mrs. Barbe continued: "The people by the church said: '*Look at the big beast*'... It made a big, big wave. It came from far away. A man who drowned three or four years later was never found again. *They thought that the thing had devoured him.*"

Speed seems to be one of the characteristics of the Horse's Head. Mrs. Barbe spoke of a "bigger wave" which came in its wake, like the eddy following a motorboat. But the beast at Blue-Sea Lake had another, even more important, characteristic: *ubiquity*. "It is said that it had pushed aside trees and dug a path between Cedar Lake and Blue-Sea Lake, in the midst of the vegetation. It was if the earth had been excavated," she recalled.

This path was mentioned in each account we heard. According to Mrs. Barbe, the phenomenon is very old, but "since 1930 nobody speaks about it any more". Let us look at the site of the observation of 1913. This lake, which owes its name "Blue-Sea" to the particular clarity of its waters, was, at the time of our investigation, covered by the snow and ice of December. The church is still there, all white, and a few steps away, a statue of the blessed Christ. The road stands out distinctly next to the lake. There are no trees and no rocks to block the view.

We stopped two passers-by. Yes, they had heard of the animal in question. It had "slithered on its stomach" up to Trente-et-un-Milles Lake, four miles away (6 km) from Blue-Sea. People had seen it last year: "It comes back regularly". At the end of the promontory it is 190 feet deep (58 m). Divers are afraid there. "They have said that some of the enormous fish there were unrecognizable." Nearby, Mr. Lacroix was serving a client at his service station. He agreed to answer our questions. He knew the stories about the beast in the lake, but had never seen it himself. "People are said to have seen it around July 1980, in the Baskatong Reservoir," he affirmed. The local press had spoken about it. "The tracks between Cedar Lake and

Olivier Garneau mimes the undulations of the monster he saw on Blue–Sea Lake. [© Michel Meurger.]

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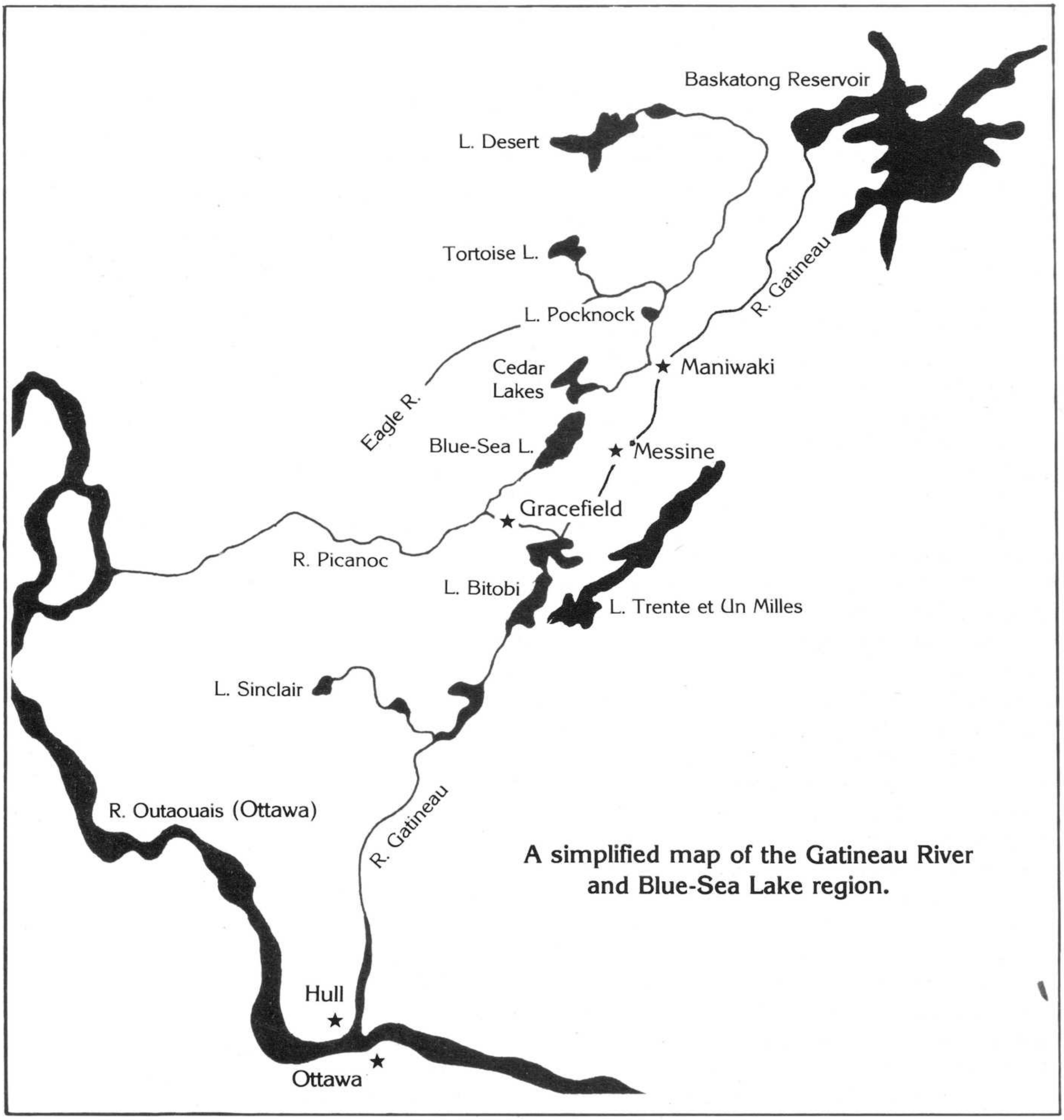
[1] ■ Mrs Barbe meant the tiny hippocampus, not the legendary sea-monster.


Baskatong Reservoir
L. Desert
Tortoise L.
R. Gatineau
L. Pocknock
Cedar Lakes
Maniwaki
Eagle R.
Blue-Sea L.
Messine
Gracefield
R. Picanoc
L. Bitobi
L. Trente et Un Milles
L. Sinclair
R. Outaouais (Ottawa)
R. Gatineau
Hull
Ottawa

A simplified map of the Gatineau River and Blue-Sea Lake region.

Blue-Sea Lake are *ancient glacial traces.*" Here, alongside the belief in the monster's trail, we find the rationalistic counter-explanation: the "tracks" were only "glacial traces". Mr. Lacroix gave us the name and address of an eyewitness, Olivier Garneau.

Mr. Garneau was outside his little house, gathering wood from a pile. Under a grey hat, the smiling blue eyes are the colour of the lake on which he had guided boats and canoes for tourists. He sat in his rocking chair. The fire was roaring. It was cosy, and the memories of this lively octogenarian (89 years old) brought us leaping across the generations to the wilder Outaouais landscape of the early settlers.

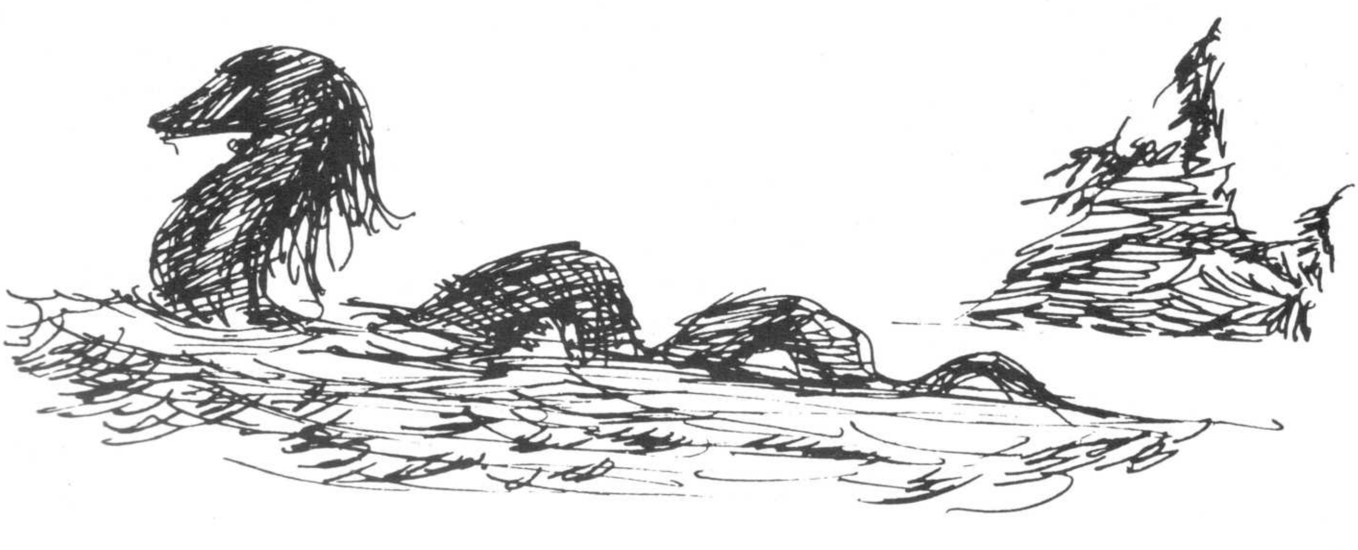
"My father saw it many times. My uncles also. When I was about 12 or 13 years old, around 1900, people would see it pretty often out here: *that was when they built the railway from*

Maniwaki. I saw it when I was 19 years old, around 1910. It appeared brown to me. I was fishing: I saw the thing, like, behind me... It picked itself up, it wasn't more than 10 feet (3 m), and the head came out from the water... A horse's head...

"I saw it the last time that it showed itself. It was near the property of the lawyer Sainte-Marie, about 30 years ago. There's an island: it crossed from one island to the other. I was at the end of Grande Pointe, Pointe-à-Belcourt, across from the Île Sainte-Marie Nord. We were getting ready for fishing. I had a fishing rod about 16 feet long. Suddenly I heard it coming from the Île de Montigny. It was like that." His hand made an arching movement. "My wife was afraid. It seemed to me that if it made an arch, a 16-foot boat (about 5m) would have been able to pass underneath. It appeared to me to be grey, like fish scales. It looked at me, its head almost folded back, like a horse... People said that it was dangerous. That's not true; they're just *afraid*. Otherwise it would have attacked me... It's never attacked anybody... "

Passers-by had, in fact, told us stories of a boat smashed by the Horse's Head. Mr. Garneau confirmed the paucity of sightings. "When I saw it 30 years ago, it had been a long time since anybody had seen anything. Twenty-five years without showing itself... Try to figure what it did with itself... At Blue-Sea they *went up in an aeroplane* and tried to see into the lake. They flew over, *observing with telescopes,* but *saw nothing*. Who says that it wasn't in the Grand Bitobi at that time? It can go up to Gatineau by the creek, to Maniwaki..."

Mr. Garneau recited the comings and goings of the Horse's Head, known to all of the shore-dwellers: "The Big Cedar Lake spills its water into Little Cedar Lake; there, it crosses and takes a *creek*, which goes out to Lake Bitobi, goes up there and follows it. There aren't more than five or six acres between Blue-Sea Lake and Cedar Lake. He could make it. I haven't gone on the lake for about four or five years. I'd heard that people saw it last summer... When people ask me if I have seen it, I say no, that it is just fears. *It has often been seen around Pointe-à-Belcourt, where it's very deep*. I never saw it in the winter. As I see it, he spends the winter under the water and therefore we never see a sign of him. In the summer you can see his traces in the creek. People used to see them there. This lake is deep.



The 'Horse's Head' of Blue–Sea Lake. A drawing by Michel Meurger based on witness description.
[© Michel Meurger.]

Blue–Sea Lake, close to the church where the congregation glimpsed the 'Horse's Head'.
[© Michel Meurger.]

lake is deep. There's at least 130 feet (40 m) of water... "

For the shore-dwellers of the past, the Horse's Head was a familiar, almost domesticated, beast. "George Turnbull, an English-speaker, saw it. We started to have tourists, they put their *containers of cream* in the water at the Pointe and he came and drank the cream. Yeah, people saw him!"

The life of Olivier Garneau is the story of *the progressive penetration of urban culture* into the protected universe of Blue-Sea Lake. "I started to work as a guide for the tourists during the 1914 war. Before that, I had been building cabins..." This bygone era of fabulous trout fishing has disappeared, drowned in the night, which took hold of us again at his door. The last words of Mr. Garneau accompanied us, as we trudged through the snow: "It's hard to see now... "

The golden age of the Horse's Head of Blue-Sea Lake was when it came to lick the cartons of cream, and to astonish the parishioners at Sunday mass. [2] It was *a time of isolation*, protected by the ramparts of winter and of the ancient forest. *The railroad from Maniwaki, the clockwork of organised tourism*, had put paid to all that. This synchronicity between the coming of a new way of life and the alleged increase in monster sightings is worth thinking about. The lake-monster image seems to help express deep conservatism and it may be that when our informants are speaking about the monster's distaste for noisy mass tourism, they are conveying their own distaste with modern society indirectly. At this level, the failure of the aeroplane to discover the mystery of the Blue-Sea can be decoded as the expression of a lack of confidence in the power of modern technology.

MICHEAL DYLAN FOSTER
'PANDEMONIUM AND PARADE'
p. 115-117 : "CONFRONTATION
BETWEEN TANUKI AND
STEAM TRAIN"

Oscar Courchène confirmed the truth of this idea the next day. He lives at Gracefield, not far from Lake Bitobi, mentioned by Mr. Garneau. He received us, with his wife, in front of the window which overlooked the Gatineau River. Mr. Courchène is 83 years old. He hasn't seen the animal himself, but he has good memories of the times when it used to appear.

According to him, the facts go back to the limits of human memory, to the end of the last century. "My father and the old men, Joe Lacroix and the others, worked there when the tourists began to arrive... It was before 1900. I was born in 1898. I knew them all, those old guys. They worked down below. Those who saw it were crossing in little rowing-boats in order to build on the islands of Blue-Sea Lake. They saw this beast *between two islands,* like a snake." He undulated his arm. *"You could have passed a boat through it when was it was making loops. It was about 30–35 feet long* (9–10 m). They tried to shoot at it, but they never found it dead. They even saw it afterwards. It crossed over, and they found its traces on Cedar Lake, at Messine."

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[2] ■ The creature was conceived, at the time, as a *snake*, as its taste for cream demonstrates. According to a widespread, ancient (and false) belief, snakes are fond of milk. This 'snake' was very likely conceived, also, as an embodiment of the Devil, because it selected the Lord's Day to manifest itself, like many other demon-beasts of legend. (For example: the Black Dog of Bungay, Suffolk, appeared on a Sunday in 1577 – Bord & Bord 1980, p88ff.)

The 'horse's head' representation belongs to the traditional *systema naturæ* of the first settlers. It reflects the pious fears of an Age of Beginnings.

Mr. Courchène had his own opinion on the present scarcity of observations of the Horse's Head: "*At that time there were no motorboats to disturb it.* Today there's nothing but motorboats. The population doubles in the summer; there are tourists all over the lake; too much noise in the water; from 1–12 boats at a time. Before that time, people were afraid to go in the water with their little rowing-boats... " We found evidence of rumours about boats overturned by the beast. "The shore-dwellers who saw it emerge would shoot at it out of fear."

According to Mrs. Courchène, it had "*a mane like a horse*". This network of lakes is not lacking in serpent forms. Mr. Courchène remembers having worked for Judge Chevrier of Ottawa. "At Lake Creux there are water snakes eight to ten feet (2.4–3 m) long. The judge killed them with his 22 rifle when he could pick out their heads above the water... but the Horse's Head is different." The Courchènes are convinced of the plausibility of extensive travels by the beast. "Blue-Sea Lake falls into the Picanoc, which goes up to the Gatineau as far as the Saint-Lawrence." The spatial distribution of sightings of the Horse's Head corresponds to an extension *in time* as well. Before the parents and grandparents of Mr. Garneau and Mr. Courchène, others had conceptualised the existence of a "horse-serpent" in Blue-Sea Lake.

The postmaster at Messine, after recalling that an ancestor "had seen it 100 years ago", told us that "it was 30–40 feet, with a mane, and the body of a serpent. It crossed from Blue-Sea Lake to Cedar Lake. Indians killed it. They hid in the forest between the two lakes and killed it on *its path.*"

We left to study the location of this dragon-hunt. The road dwindled to a path. Snow covered everything, letting only some ragged growth come up in the miles and miles of forest. Scattered under the pines were the cottages of bear-trappers. The place is cut off by the hills in a total isolation. And there is Little Cedar Lake. A black curtain of trees encircles it, convenient for ambushing monsters. What were we going to look for there? Everything here is hidden, all is quiet. Finally the silence and solitude forced us to leave.

Maniwaki. We climbed up the little front steps of the home of Louis Commanda, an Algonkian brother of the Indian who many years ago – echoing the gesture of Jacques Cartier [**3**] but in reverse – planted the Indian flag on the Champs-Élysées, in Paris. At Blue-Sea Lake there are no insulting, ridiculous articles about the native people, as at Lake Saint-Jean. With frankness and humour, Mr. Commanda tells the ignorant that

3 ■ Jacques Cartier (1491–1557), the French explorer who discovered the Saint Lawrence River, and the site of Montréal. See Chapter 4.

Louis Commanda.
[© Michel Meurger.]

for his people the Horse's Head is an old story. "We call it *Misiganebic*, the Great Serpent," he said. "He is the friend of the waters, the cleaner of the waves. He has been seen at Lake Désert, at Lake Bitobi, at Lake Pocknock, and in the Gatineau River. He is said to be 30 feet long. The creature always appears during clear weather, and it shines in all its colours." For Mr. Commanda "there is a Misiganebic in each lake, as there are very few traces of passage from one lake to another". Where do they hide in the winter? "The Misiganebic is like a catfish. You can't see them. They go to the bottom."

At Lake Désert, Mike Scott, an Amerindian, is said to have seen one of them about 15 years ago. He saw the *humps* of a beast and the head of a horse; the humps didn't move. For the Algonkins "when somebody sees it, he dies". This is what happened to Mike Scott, according to Mr. Commanda.

Louis Commanda doesn't believe in the ambush of Cedar Lake. The Indians respect these animals too much. Even today, the people of his tribe "*put out baskets of food* at the four cardinal points of Blue-Sea Lake, thanking the Creator for the Misiganebic who cleans the lake". Ewelyn de Devwache, Mr. Commanda's daughter, remarked that the Indians had asked the Catholic priest of Maniwaki to revive this offering of baskets to the "Great Serpent" of the waves.

The description ot Misiganebic borrows some elements from several other animals. Ewelyn reminded us that "*the beings are interconnected*". Thus, as her grandfather told her, the lizard is half salmon and half trout. As for the possible haunts of the beast, she informed us of the existence of *a cavern*, near the water, on Lake Pocknock: a cavern "without a bottom". Speaking of those who had drowned in Blue-Sea Lake, Mr. Commanda said that the Algonkins had a "gift from God" of being able to recover the drowned from under the ice. "My father, who worked for one of them, made a hole here in the ice. The drowned person was found there."

Horse's Head, serpent with a horse's head, Misiganebic, guides, fishermen, pioneers, back to the Indians: all these aspects attest a mix of various influences, represented in the present strong belief in some serpent with equine characteristics. Its appearances are not restricted to a single lake; people have noted it in at least eight lakes: Blue-Sea, the two Cedar lakes, Bitobi, Trente-et-un-Milles, the Baskatong Reservoir, Lake Désert, and Lake Pocknock. It remains only to discover the origin of the name of the nearby 'Serpent Lake'. According to Mr. Garneau of Blue-Sea Lake, the two Cedar lakes and Lake Bitobi are linked to each other. They connect with the Gatineau River, as does the Trente-et-un-Milles Lake and Lake Désert. At the end of the last century, the Misiganebic had the imprudence to show itself in Lake Deschênes, near Ottawa, where in 1880, a "dark green" serpent, "as thick as a telegraph pole", was seen between the lighthouse and the shore. [4]

In the ideology of the local folk, the Horse's Head is therefore like the monster of Lake Saint-Jean, conceived as a serpent-shaped traveller which moves from one lake to another when the rivers and the streams permit, and doesn't hesitate,

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4 ■ Toronto *Globe* 8 July 1880, p2.

in the absence of these, to excavate his *passage* in dry land. In the vicinity of the enormous Baskatong Reservoir, where it had been seen the summer before, Misiganebic leaves that liquid star and spreads outwards across the water courses, to revel with the carp and perch in dozens of lakes. A pilgrim of clear and tranquil waters, Misiganebic ought to be chosen as the totem, or symbol, for all ecologists for its role in cleaning the lakes; a task made more and more difficult on a Blue-Sea polluted by motors and the remains of tourists' meals.

A SLICE OF SERPENT AT LAKE SINCLAIR

We present here, with all of the reservations that it merits, a rather strange story. We owe it to André Arsenault, whose testimony we have already cited in this work.

"Around the summer of 1966, when I was about 14 years old, I was on vacation at some friends' cottage on the shores of Lake Sinclair, in the Ottawa valley. It's a large enough lake, some four or five miles long, with a rocky bottom and surrounded by mountains. A friend and I penetrated the swamps, by way of a river, and came to a dead end with our motorboat. There, at the bottom of the river, which we could no longer navigate, amongst dead trees, moss and algae, we saw an object floating and wallowing in two or three inches of water. It was obviously a section of a cylinder; light browny yellow, 24 inches (60 cm) long and 10 inches (25 cm) in diameter. We raised it with an oar. It was heavy. It didn't have the texture of a fish. And there were no fins. It was like a tube. You could say it was like a clean-cut sausage, but what could have cut this piece? My friend, who was an habitual fisherman, had never seen anything like this. He said that it resembled part of an enormous *serpent*. Even the colour wasn't that of fish flesh. It couldn't have been there more than a week, because the flesh was still firm. If it was part of a serpent, like I think, *it must have been an enormous one*. In the same lake there were many small snakes and tortoises."

André had thought this episode over during the intervening years. This "tube" could have been, all the same, a fragment of an enormous fish or of an eel enlarged by childish eyes. It's possible. But after all, isn't it really a matter of a monster, considering the size of the fragment? André is positive that, in his later life as a professional diver, he has never encountered anything similar. His friend, a connoisseur of local wildlife, had never identified this strange fragment.

An examination of the map of the peregrinations of the "horse-headed serpent" permits two alternative interpretations. Lake Sinclair is linked to the Gatineau River. One of the travelling monsters, moving along this river up to the Basketong Reservoir, might finally come to its end in this swamp. A cryptozoologist might say that these two children, playing at 'Robinson Crusoe', might have discovered a trophy which would have made any naturalist jealous; a portion of the coils of an unknown creature, about which the Algonkin legends had told for centuries. A culturalist would surely answer that, in this region, with age-old cycles of legends about Misiganebics and Horse Heads, the two adventurous lads may have been influenced at the time of their discovery precisely *by* this belief. When he became an adult, André could have forgotten his knowledge of the legends, making him rationalize some banal discovery. Here is a precise *demonstration* that some people's *relics of materiality* can be interpreted as an *example of a prevalent belief* by others.

BRUNO LATOUR: 'QUASI-OBJECTS'

There is no way to decide between these two directions. The only benefit is for the happy young Robinson Crusoes who today, instead of trying to catch plesiosaurs by their tails, can appreciate the poetic meaning of this juvenile quest for wonder.

THE POETIC MEANING
MATTERS OF CONCERN
VS. MATTERS OF FACT

1.12

LAC-DES-PILES AND SAINT-MAURICE: THE SERPENT AND THE DROWNED MAN

A simple memory and a legend lead us along the tracks of the beautiful, sombre Saint-Maurice valley. An informant remembers a placard put up by the former owner of a hotel in Saint-Roch-de-Mékinac around 1956: "This is where a sea serpent was seen". Lac-des-Piles, close by, "did not give up the bodies of the drowned". The shore-dwellers around it remember particularly well a man who fell from his longboat. His body was "devoured by a monster". His restless soul will always haunt its icy waters. "In the evening, when the mist is descending on the lake, *the drowned man of Lac-des-Piles comes up to the surface.*" On arriving at the town of Grand Mère we learnt that the jealous lake had, for once, recently given up one of its victims. The "drowned man of Lac-des-Piles" had been found the previous autumn. We asked the Québec police for confirmation.

Inspector Roland Latour received us with great courtesy. Yes, he remembered this odd occurrence. In 1946 a passenger on a boat, Pierre Auger, was taken ill and fell into the waters of the Lac-des-Piles. In spite of a thorough search he was never found. "We even blasted the lake to make the corpse rise, but all in vain. Until, by chance, a diver on the shelf 40 feet (12 m) underwater - beyond which the lake falls to 100 feet (30 m) – found some leg bones, a pair of spectacles, a rosary in its case, the sheath of a dagger and shoes. An old sister of M. Auger remembered giving the rosary to the drowned man, and it was thanks to her that the skeleton was identified."

There are various odd details in this affair, however, which shore up the legend. Inspector Latour "found it funny that divers went down every year in the same place, where he made his discovery, without finding anything". And the tibias were found, not at the spot where the accident took place (according to the map), but some distance away. "The skull was not found at all. One of the drowned man's sandals was chewed, the other intact," he continued. Some of these things can be explained by the presence of strong underwater currents and some by the sharp teeth of fishes. Nevertheless the discovery is not enough, in itself, to lessen the community's anxieties, particularly their belief that more people seem to drown than are actually found.

"Two or three months before the skeleton was recovered, a young girl swimming near the bank saw a naked man at the bottom of the water. She tried to mark the place with a large cross, but a police patrol found nothing," we were told. We also heard of the sighting of "a lad falling off a log, in his fur coat". Here again the detectives were unable to substantiate the visual claim. Apparitions or mirages? This stretch of water, guarding a discreet population of the drowned, keeps its origins just as secret. "Some people say that *Lac-des-Piles was dug out by a meteorite...* " According to long-standing rumour, its depth was unfathomable: "You could put a line down and not find the bottom."

THE 'CRITTER' OF SAINT-MAURICE

Victor Trahan, a old friend of the hapless Mr. Auger, provided us with some additional information on the fatal accident. His son remembers a tradition of "a way under Lac-des-Piles to Lake Canard by means of an underground river", although this large mere is already linked to Lac-des-Piles by a more conventional stream. Unfathomability, jealously guarded drowned men, monster, underground communications with other reservoirs - we've now heard this several times before...

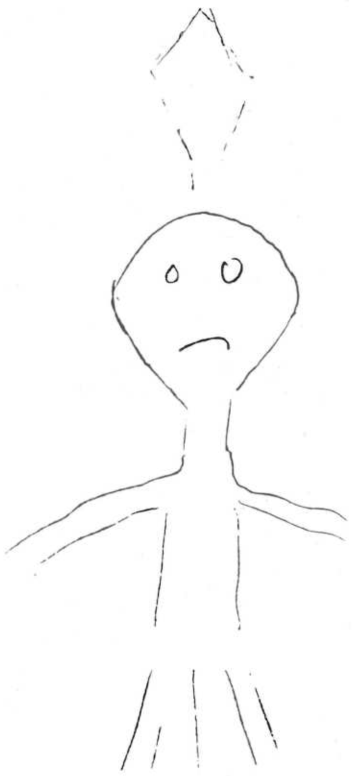
Not to mention the currents and the blackness: "There are really strong currents, it drags you off your feet at the bottom. You can't see a thing at 200 feet (60 m)..."

Beneath *Lake Mékinac*, an inland sea, you might find a "huge cavern with stairs inside..." We asked Mr. Trahan's son if he remembered anything about the placard at the hotel. He had never heard of it, but he did remember a *"critter found on the edge of the Saint-Maurice River* and thought to be from outer space: it had a lozenge-shaped head, a tail and paws." He agreed to sketch it, and phoned a friend who also remembered the story run by the local newspaper.

Previous evidence allowed us to link this unusual "critter" [1] with a fact which would have livened up any local paper: the strange lights of *a flying saucer landing on Lac-des-Piles.*

With the *'Saint-Maurice critter'*, we seem to have the conversion of an aquatic monster into a UFO occupant. Under the influence of newspaper articles, frequently mentioning discoveries of "bodies from outer space" [2], old local traditions of unidentified ravaging creatures floating down the Saint-Maurice have been reinterpreted in the modern idiom. This is not a recent process. In a fantasy novel published in 1931, the New England writer H.P. Lovecraft talked of "weird stories about the discoveries of unknown creatures floating in the waters of several rising rivers."

Lovecraft, who had doubtless dug into a stock of legends similar to the Saint-Maurice ones, also modernises his sources by presenting these floating things as "winged crabs" from another planet. [3] And luminous phenomena, similar to the



The 'critter' of Saint–Maurice, sketched by Victor Trahan's son. [© Michel Meurger.]

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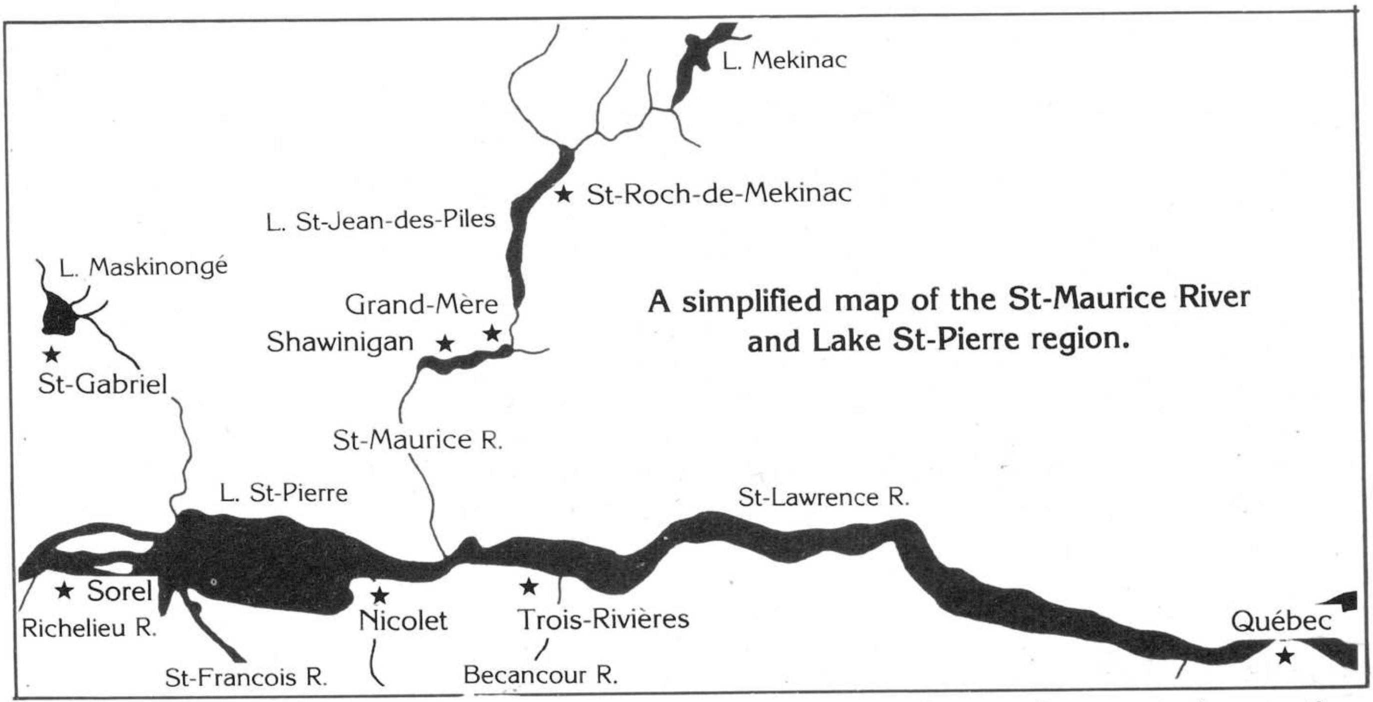
[1] ■ *"Bebite"*, a commonplace expression in Québec popular speech for insects generally, or specifically an unidentified insect, here used in the sense of "critter".

[2] ■ The most famous of these "alien corpses" was reproduced in 1950 in a Cologne journal; it shows a sort of Lilliputian in tights. (See 'Crashed Flying Saucers', in Sachs 1981.)

Beyond these faked photographs there are even extra-terrestrial relics (eg. locks of hair), hinting at an industry resembling that which produced the 'sirens', mermaids, Jenny Hanivers, etc, seen in some European museums. In May 1970, the skeleton of a macrocephalic child was portrayed in a Venezuelan magazine as a "skeleton from outer space". (See Bergier and Gallet 1975.)

[3] ■ H.P. Lovecraft, 'The whisperer in darkness', in *Weird Tales* August 1931.



A simplified map of the St-Maurice River and Lake St-Pierre region.

lights on Lac-des-Piles, are frequently reported on other monster lakes. The oldest evidence we have discovered is the lay of *Beowulf,* an eighth century Anglo-Saxon epic in which the unfathomably deep lair of the Fen monster, Grendel, is said to marked by a luminous manifestation: "Every night you could see the terrible sight of a fire on the lake". [**4**]

The list of the drowned unrecovered from Lac-des-Piles grew with practically every new witness; even a "diver" and a "child" were said to be victims. The bottom of Lac-des-Piles was believed to have "mountains similar to those above the surface". It was supposed to be fed from underground streams: "That's the reason the water is so chilly [*"frette"*]... " Could this secret source be the underground water-course alleged to join up with Lake Canard? The Lac-des-Piles locals used to say: "It's a chasm; it's the edge of an abyss..." They used to express doubts about the practicality of raising the bodies of the drowned with a shrug. "It's no use, he's fallen into the bottomless lake," they'd say. "A whole family died in it after a big party." Conclusion: "It's a lake to be feared". This terror has certainly contributed to the rumours of a monster.

Eventually, we managed to trace the hotel with the placard. It was the Fontainbleau Hotel on the Saint-Maurice River at the Grandes-Piles heights. But what a surprise! We came upon blackened ruins: the building had burnt down several months before. It was here, however, that a "big snake" was seen in the river. Various witnesses confirmed it, and several even remembered the placard. It is still spoken of. A farmer sending his flock to graze on the banks of the Saint-Maurice noticed his sheep "going down". He hid under cover with his rifle and waited for a view of the thief. "He heard his sheep bleating and saw something, a snake going back into the water."

The "Saint-Maurice Serpent" and the odd extra- terrestrial homunculus are only two of a whole series of "critters" which have been noticed on this major tributary of the Saint-Lawrence. The brown tide of logs at Trois-Rivieres brings with it rumours from La Tuque, which merit a closer study.

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4 ■ *Beowulf,* ed. D. Wright 1970.

LAKE MÉKINAC'S 'BIG PIKE'

Now we have to get to grips with a really big fish. The Lake Mékinac fishermen enthusiastically discuss the *"Big Pike"* amongst themselves. Luc Giroy, an old man in Saint-Joseph, spoke to us of encounters with "the dreadful thing". Roland Vézina saw it "climbing up the *end* of the river, between Lake Long (Missionary Lake) and Lake Mékinac". Mr. Giroy clearly remembers the Fontainebleau notice about "the beast seen in the Saint-Maurice, in the time of Cloutier, the former owner of the hotel... A really big snake they had all been afraid of."

This snake – or one of its kind – must have returned a short while ago for, according to Mr. Giroy: "It surfaced recently - two years ago..." We talked with our host about the old times and the fauna of the region. Wolves come near the settlements, he told us, pointing to the thickly wooded hills. "They howl here in the autumn..." The wolf provides the realistic support for fantastic creatures, spoken of fearfully in the evening get-togethers in the region – the "big grey beast", the Werewolf. Perhaps the "Big Pike" of Mékinac is used in the same way to support a less well defined monster?

Mr. Vézina admitted having seen the large fish in question in the river between the two lakes. He sees the "Big Pike" *every year.* In 1956 the Saint-Maurice Serpent was widely discussed. He introduced us to an old rafter, Zépherin Doucet, who affirmed that there are places in Lake Mékinac where "you can't reach the bottom. Big fish stay between 250 and 300 feet..." Then he told us the story of *The Devil's Hole* which is undoubtedly the "cavern with staircases" mentioned by Mr. Trahan's son.

"The entrepreneurs [*"jobbeurs"*] who went into the Saint-Maurice forest spoke of a huge abyss in Lake Mékinac, the Devil's Hole. Once, a diving-bell they sent down had to come up again for lack of air. There must have been a fairy [*"fée"*] at the bottom. The Hole was on a big, big mountain. They trudged up there, but saw nothing. People said that they piled brushwood up against the hole, but the next day it had gone. That is near where the *'Fairies' Garden'* with its flowers and wild onions must have been. They looked for it, but never found it. The lake is cross-shaped, and in the Billé branch there is a 250-foot-tall fissured headland. No one can go there; you'd need to be a mountaineer... The Devil's Hole must be at the foot of this cliff. The lake is very deep there. They put a 300 foot line down and couldn't touch the bottom..."

The region called the "Fairies' Garden" reminds us of the "Fairy's Hole" near which Ashuaps, the Saint-Jean lake-monster, was seen. The name "Devil's Hole" demonises the lair of the legend. In this region the Devil was very much at home, as evidenced by the "Saint-Maurice's Forge" legend cycle. [5]

Lake Mékinac has been used for floating logs several times, and huts for the loggers were built around it. Some of these foresters, however, had the reputation of having made a pact with "Charlot", an evil spirit. Perhaps the search for the Devil's Hole was undertaken with the object of making contact with the Evil One for a trip in the *flying canoe*, the famous

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[5] ■ Abbé N. Caron, 'Légendes des Forges de Saint-Maurice,' in *Contes et légendes des vieilles Forges*, Trois-Rivières, 1954.

"Flying Boat" [*"Chasse-Galerie"*]. Another informant spoke to us about these craft "driven by Indians", flying over Lake Travers, near Sainte-Thècle. It is only a short step from the foresters' "flying canoes" to the UFOs of Lac-des-Piles; the myth remains intact, despite its mechanisation, especially in the Saint-Maurice valleys, where *"abductions by flying saucers"* are an alternative to *"abductions by the devil"*. [**6**]

According to this legendary world-view, many things vanished behind the dark curtain of pine-wood in olden times. The *lake disappearances* used to run concurrently with the *"Chasse-Galerie" abductions.* Woodcutters who witnessed these forest disappearances saw the *fiery canoe* skimming the high treetops. [**7**] And the humus of the undergrowth rarely returned the men who faded away.

"Bark canoe which flies and flies,
Bark canoe will fly... "

THE MONSTERS OF TORTOISE LAKE

In this propitious light the monsters are about to resurface. René Latour mentioned *Tortoise Lake* [*Lac-à-la-Tortue*], in which "there were immense fishes". A fisherman we met at Grand Mère, Claude Gervais, gave us his version: "In this lake there were larger sized things than ordinary fish: for example, the *six foot maskinongé* (1.83 m). They don't usually go above 50 inches, even the longest ones... They found a dog with its feet chopped off... A child had his (Holy) medal snatched off... Three years ago people were afraid to swim there..." "In *Lake Mékinac* there is even a six foot pike. A couple of years ago a team of divers went down. One of these men saw a monster of this size circling him under the water; he was at a depth of 400 feet (120 m). At the bottom there are rocks, and currents which grab the line. You can let out 500 feet of cable (150 m). That's where you find the eight pound *ouananiches* and a pike which sleeps peacefully at the bottom... Mékinac is linked to *Missionary Lake.* Here the drowned men get lost just like they do at Lac-aux-Piles, which is a bottomless lake... "

THE 'METEOR' OF THE GOUIN RESERVOIR

If you follow the course of the Saint-Maurice River you end up at the enormous Gouin reservoir. It was on one of the many smaller lakes, united to form this real inland sea, that an unknown monster was seen by a friend of Mr. Gervais.

"A certain Mr. Geoffroy, from Parent, really saw an unidentified animal. It moved away from the edge of Lake Brochu, making a wave, swelling out of the water as it went. Geoffroy has a 120 horse-power engine on his boat; he tried to catch up with it at *35 mph* (56 kph), but couldn't get near it. There aren't any animals which can go at that speed. He told me this about four years ago, just after it had happened; he shared the adventure with his son. I'm quite serious. In any case, it wasn't a fish, because *it came from dry land.* It went under

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6 ■ For the alleged disappearances of woodcutters, see L. Fréchette, 'Le diable des Forges,' in *L'Almanach du peuple Beauchemin*, Montréal, 1904.

For alleged UFO abductions see Sachs 1980, 'Disappearances'; and Rimmer 1984.

7 ■ Local source.

the surface, quite lightly cutting through the water. *He said that it was a prehistoric creature stranded there.* It is quite true that the basin of the Gouin barrage formerly had access to the sea. Maybe an animal was kept imprisoned by this enormous watery mass after the seas retreated."

This amphibious 'meteor' reminds us of the remark made by Paul-Émile Grenier about the Lake Aylmer monster: "An outboard motor couldn't keep up with it." These localized phenomena seemed to us to be similar to the Outaouais ones. There, a large river, the Gatineau, is linked on one side to a major waterway, the Outaouais, and on the other to the immense stretch of water of the Baskatong reservoir. All along the lakes linked with the Gatineau River right up to the reservoir there have been sightings of the *horse-headed serpent.*

Here, the observations of the "serpent" have taken place in the river itself, whereas the terminal reservoir has its own, well-known, phenomenon. There is more than co-incidence in that: perhaps various elements of a legend cycle? The Saint-François River, to the east of Québec, with its various monster-haunted lakes, plays an analogous role as the principal means of transference. We will establish that similar networks exist in British Colombia. [8] Like the "Serpent" of the Outaouais, the Gouin reservoir creature is an *amphibian.*

But what about the Saint-Maurice monsters? People around Tortoise Lake confirmed that, about seven or eight years previously, there had been a flap of activity. There was a host of small incidents, from tiny bites to "something grabbing at swimmers' toes or removing ankle chains from legs dangling in the water." These nuisances were repeated again two years ago. Some people *interpreted* these pranks as the attacks of a *maskinongé;* however on this little, rather polluted lake, this fish would never have been fished for.

The *maskinongé* can reach quite comfortable dimensions, like the 5-foot (1.5 m) specimen, stuffed and proudly exhibited by a Shawinigan chemist. Here, however, as in Lake Maskinongé, on the same bank of the river, there seems to be too much of a hurry to render admissible that which is unknown. There are common monsters and there are abnormal monsters. The former are distinguishable from usual animals principally by their size; the latter firstly by their shape. Often, as this enquiry has taught us, the common monster is only the first layer, the superficial stratum of a cultural phenomenon whose multiple levels get lost in the depths of interpretation. [9]

The "Big Pike" of Saint-Rémi, the *"maskinongé"* of the eponymous lake and even the bizarre "tortoise" of Lake Commanda [10] are themselves only one of the representations which, like the famous Russian dolls, seem to multiply themselves into infinity. This secret truth, with all its multiples, could *enrich* our view of man's imaginary world, as opposed to the *impoverishment* of the usual reductions with their cult of *fictional* objectivity. That is why we decided to *refuse nothing* in our quest, to present the matter of our studies *just as it presented itself to us.* That has led us to include all the tributaries which are normally ignored, but which give the main stream its sense and its strength.

"CULT OF FICTIONAL OBJECTIVITY"

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[8] And probably in Alberta, also. The Battle River, near Edmonton, is linked to important lakes, and in July 1934, was the scene of a sighting, by several people, of a "monster with a long neck" swimming at about 25 kph. "Bullets seemed to have not the slightest effect on it." (A. Van Hageland 1973.)

[9] See back to p53f.

[10] These two mentalities – one which, from the different meanings of the word 'monster', can only grasp the feature of unaccustomed size; and the other, which can only see unaccustomed shape – can be found side-by-side in the interpretations of the monsters of the French mountain lakes of the Vosges.

Among *the giants,* we find: huge carp in Lake Sewen, huge pike in Lake Longemer, 100-year-old trout in the lake of Ballon, and an enormous frog said to occupy the Lachtelweiher.

Among the *unusual forms,* most notable is the lake of Ballon, in which dwell, according to tradition, beasts with "the heads of monkeys and cats on dragon-like bodies," which haul themselves onto the banks to devour cattle. The giant carp of Lake Sewen are associated with Will-o'-the-Wisps, believed to be unquiet souls. (G. Illberg 1967.)

1.13

A MORPHOLOGICAL BALANCE SHEET

In the course of this inquiry, five principal shapes of the cultural phenomenon under study have appeared to us. First, the "*Horse's Head*", or the "*serpent with a horse's head*", of Lake Champlain, Lake Aylmer, Lake Pohénégamook, Blue-Sea Lake, and the expanses of water which are connected to them. Next, the "*living trunk*" of Moffat Lake and Trois-Lacs. Then, the *serpent* of Lake Saint-Jean and Lake Williams. Finally, witnesses have spoken of an "*enormous fish*" at Lake Rémi and Lake Maskinongé, and also of its cousin, "*the overturned boat*", at Lake Brompton, which can be compared to the whale's back of Lake Saint-François.

A glance at a map shows us, however, that at several lakes *some or all* of these diverse forms have been sighted. Thus, at Memphrémagog there have been descriptions of a "serpent with a horse's head" as well as a "living trunk", a "great pike", and even a "seal with a long neck". Likewise, at Lake Saint- Francois, the "big fish", the "living trunk", and the "Horse's Head" appear. Given the appetite attributed to the animal, notably in this last lake – even if there are several individuals, as Mr. Roy thinks – *three different species* of predators as large as these could not co-exist in one lake. Even Lake Champlain would not be enough to satisfy their needs.

This protean characteristic can also be primordial and the plurality arises from the different cultural intellectualizations of a wholly mythical creature.

The relationship of the lake-system with the sea can also be the sign of a relationship with history; as we shall see, the Québecian topography favoured by the lake monster has to do with using rivers and lakes firstly as routes of discovery, then as portage highways, hunting and fishing trails, and transport for timber during logging periods. Lake monsters would be, in this case, allegories of the perils of the wilderness.

A table showing the variety of forms reported from some southern Québec lakes.

	Big fish	Horse-head	Living log	Boat-like	Seal	Serpent
Aylmer	✓	✓			✓	
Brompton	✓	✓		✓		
Champlain		✓				
Massawippi						✓
Memphrémagog	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Moffat			✓			
Pohénégamook	✓	✓	✓	✓		
St-François	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Trois-Lacs	✓		✓			
Williams						✓

CHAPTER 2

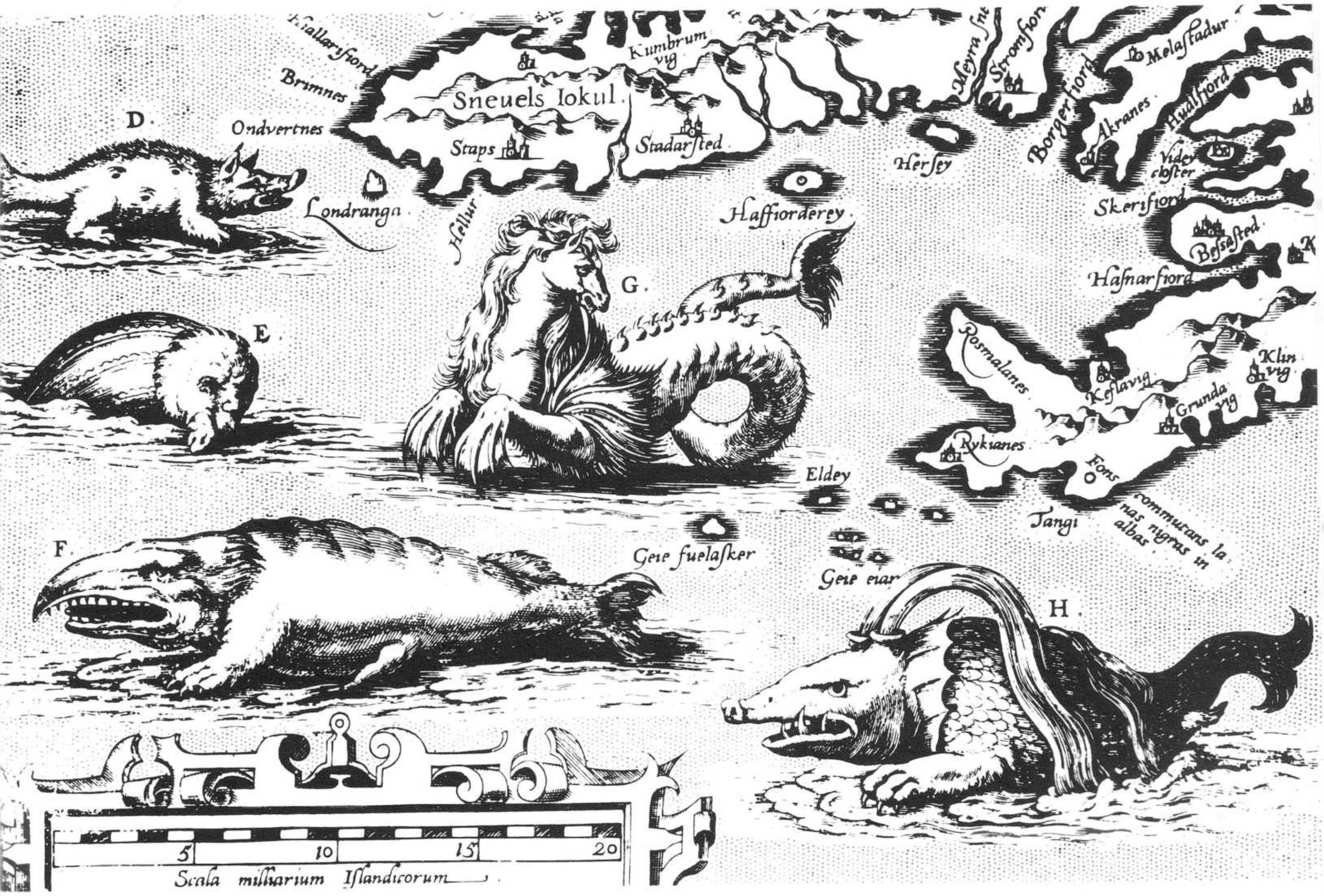
EUROPE

2.1

THE "MUTILATED HORSE" AND ITS PEDIGREE

A comparison between observations of lake monsters such as we have recorded and traditional legends reveals a strong coincidence between the two sources. Champ, Ponik and Ogopogo are described as a sort of "horse", or "horse-cow". Mrs. Desbiens of Saint-Éleuthère described an animal she had spotted in the shallow waters as a "*horse lying down*... with a cow's head... without ears". At Lake Champlain, the monster seen by Charles Mazurowsky in July 1978 looked like "a horse's head without ears". Ogopogo honoured Mr. Beans with one of his rare appearances on the scene, in 1950: "It was an enormous horse, which moved in the water," he said. [1] Another privileged person, Mrs. Campbell, saw "a head like a cow's or a horse's". [2]

The resemblance is sometimes so strong that it determines the name of the creature, as the "Horse's Head" at Blue-Sea Lake. Let us remember also the "Horse Head" of Lake Aylmer and Lake Saint-François, the "Horse's Head with red eyes" description of the "horse-serpent" of Memphrémagog, and even the "fish with a cow's head" of Massawippi. These identifications have many points in common with two groups


Kiallarsford
Brimnes
D.
Ondvertnes
Londranga
Sneuels Iokul
Kumbrum vig
Staps
Stadarſted
Heilur
Haffiorderey
Herſey
Meyra ſnt
Stromſion
Borgerfiord
Melaſtadur
Akranes
Hualfiord
Vider cloſter
Skerifiord
Beſsaſted
Hafnarfiord
G.
E.
Rosmalanes
Keflavig
Klin vig
Grunda vig
Rykianes
Fons commutans lanas nigras in albas
Tangi
Eldey
Geie fuelaſker
Geie eiar
F.
H.
5
10
15
20
Scala milliarium Iſlandicorum

Detail of Ortelius's map of Iceland (1585). The monstrous life in its surrounding waters are mostly derived from the works of Olaus Magnus and his successors. For example, Olaus' pig-headed 'sea-dragon' (see caption on p139) is here (monster D more like a polar bear than a pinniped .

However, the magnificent sea-horse, with its flowing mane, dragon's spine and fish-tail is a traditional representation.)

[BBC Hulton Picture Library]

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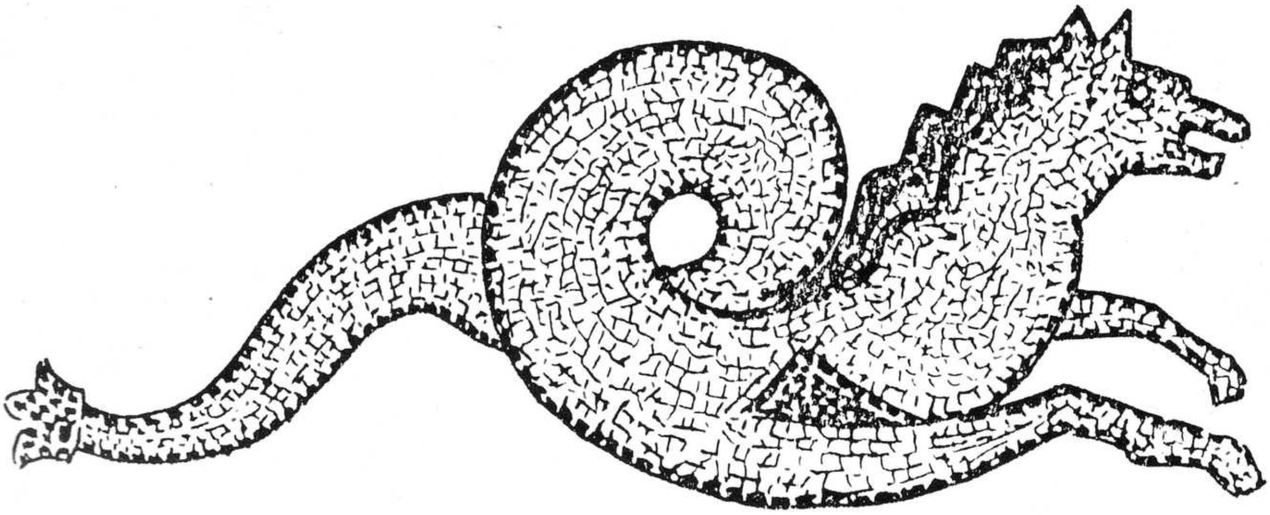
1 ■ *Penticton Herald*, August 1950.

2 ■ *Okanagan Courier* 10 July 1952. Earless and cow-headed forms are discussed further in Chapter 4, p226ff.

of fabulous beasts, the water-horses and the water-cattle. The supposed habitations of these creatures are very widespread: the British Isles, Scandinavia, Siberian Russia, France, Italy, Czechoslovakia, and Southern Slavic countries. The legends sometimes distinguished further, between water-horses and the serpentine monsters of lakes and seas. This is the case in Norway, where Homeric combats between the two spirits in the middle of the fjords have been described. [**3**] However, in the same country, stories also attribute a long horse's mane to the sea-serpent. The Swedish bishop Olaus Magnus pointed out this characteristic in 1555. [**4**] Modern Norwegian folklore attributes an equine head and mane to some lake beasts [**5**], and the snout of a calf to others. References to bodies which resemble a "log", or an "overturned boat", show that such imaginary beings correspond to the ones described around North American lakes. Olaus Magnus indicated that the water-horse "*has cloven hooves like a cow, and is as much at home on earth as it is in water*". [**6**] In Scotland, people believe in a possible crossing between the water-bull and the water-horse. The monster of Loch Garten, under the pine forest of Abernethy, is said to be a horrible black-maned hybrid of the two species. [**7**] The pedigree of the legendary Celtic water cattle is generally more orthodox. The Highlanders recognised *two* species of water-horses: the *Each-Uisge* which haunts the sea and the lochs, and the *Kelpie* which is found in running water. [**8**]

The Kelpie is said to have cousins: one in the Shetland Islands in the person of the *Noggle*, and another in the Isle of Man, the *Cabyll-Uisge* [**9**], and a third, *Ceffyl-dŵr*, in the rivers of Wales. [**10**] The usual appearance of these aquatic steeds is that of small, quite ordinary horses; only their kin from Ireland, the "horse-eels", present, from the outside, serpent-like shapes. [**11**] They possess, nevertheless, the power of *metamorphosis* into beautiful young men. The Kelpies themselves prefer the appearance of a wild man covered with hair. [**12**]

They can sometimes *fly*: under one of its forms the *Each-Uisge* appears as a giant aquatic bird, the *Boobrie* of the lochs of Argyllshire. [**13**] In the south of Wales the horse



A French water–horse in mosaic, found at Liffol–le Grand, department of Les Vosges. From Jollois, *Mémoires sur quelques antiquités des Vosges* **(1830).**

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3 ■ T.Å. Bringsvaerd 1979.

4 ■ Olaus Magnus 1555.

5 ■ Elisabeth Skjelsvik, 'Norwegian lake and sea monsters,' in *Norveg Folkelivsgransking*, Oslo, vol 7 (1960).

6 ■ Olaus Magnus 1555.

7 ■ R.M. Robertson 1961.

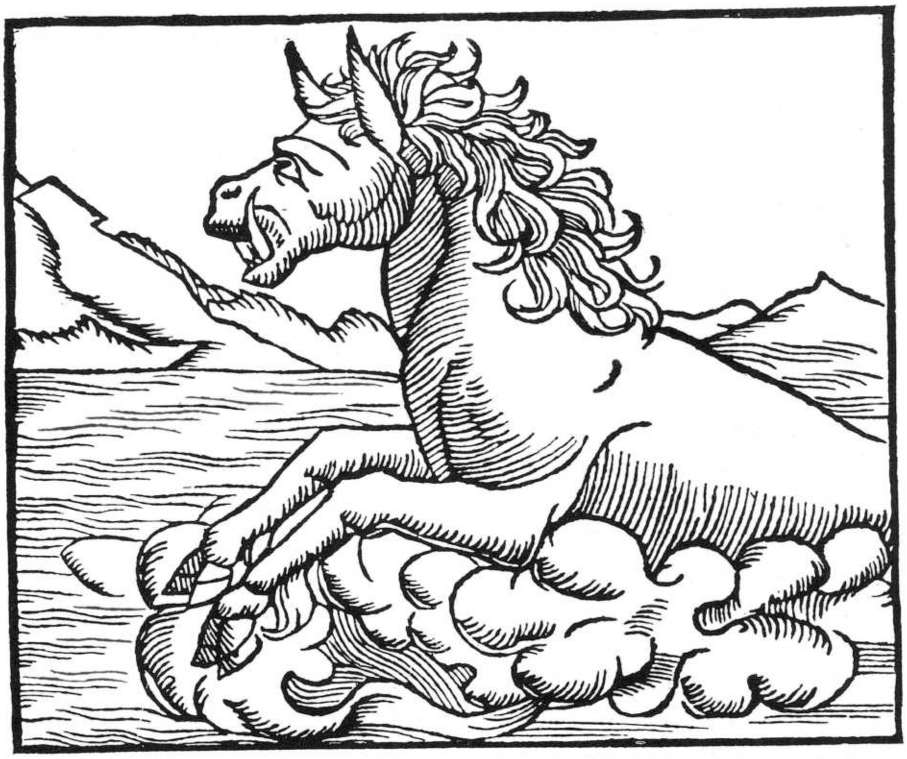
8 ■ K. Briggs 1976.

9 ■ *ibidem*.

10 ■ M. Trevelyan 1909.

11 ■ K. Blind, 'Scottish, Shetlandic and Germanic water tales,' in *Contemporary Review* 1881.

12 ■ K. Briggs 1976.



The water-horse, depicted with boar's tusks, in Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia* (1550). [Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library.]

possesses wings. [**14**] It is noteworthy that the tradition holds that Loch Ness is a *retreat of the water-horses.* [**15**] One man presented himself to the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau and claimed that the monster flew through the night to devour the shore-dwellers. [**16**] This is consistent with the presumed meat diet of the *Each-Uisge,* which devours its victims at the bottom of the lake, leaving their livers to float to the surface. [**17**]

Researchers, who often mistake legends for testimonies, should be more circumspect as regards these same legends, particularly because alleged reality can often be rationalized myth. The habitation of the water-horses is frequently localised in or near ancient monuments. The *Each-Uisge* of Loch Pityoulish in the Cairngorms is said to be found at the bottom of a *"crannog"*, a submerged prehistoric dwelling, which could be seen in the depths in good weather. [**18**]

The water-horse of Wales seeks its prey by the river shore at the site of a Roman camp and an even older Celtic retrenchment. [**19**] The systematic searching of Loch Ness has revealed submerged stone circles, doubtless megalithic monuments. [**20**] The water-horse is associated with the wheel, as are sea-serpents and, more generally, all water-spirits. The Kelpie loves to destroy mill-wheels; the Noggle was happy just to stop them. The tail of the water- horse has the shape of a half-wheel. [**21**] The observations probably have some association with whirlpools in the rivers; and there is a widespread tradition which attributes the origin of tempests to animals in serpent form. In Hungary, the whirlwind is called the "dragon's tail". [**22**]

These aquatic stallions are likewise linked to a symbolic fire and are said to produce luminous phenomena. The Kelpie disappears like a lightning bolt. [**23**] The *Ceffyl-dŵr* of Wales shines like a light, its beams bathing the surrounding area. [**24**] An evening traveller who was surprised by the Noggle, saw it disappear into the waves, *leaving a large wake of blueish fire.* [**25**] According to Paul Karl Blind: "The caudal wheel of the

13 ■ J.F. Campbell 1890-1893, vol 4.

14 ■ M. Trevelyan 1909.

15 ■ J.M. McKinley 1893.

16 ■ N. Witchell 1974.

17 ■ K. Briggs 1976.

18 ■ R.M. Robertson 1961.

19 ■ M. Trevelyan 1909.

20 ■ *Fortean Times* N° 21 (Spring 1977), p29.
Fortean Times, a journal of discussion and reports of strange phenomena, is published from: 96 Mansfield Road, London NW3 2HX, England.

21 ■ K. Blind, 'Scottish, Shetlandic and Germanic water tales,' in *Contemporary Review* 1881.

22 ■ A. Solymossy, 'Le dragon dans les contes populaires Hongrois,' in *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie*, vol 63, 1940.

23 ■ K. Briggs 1976.

24 ■ M. Trevelyan 1909.

25 ■ K. Blind, 'Scottish, Shetlandic and Germanic water tales,' in *Contemporary Review* 1881.

water-horse of the Shetlands radiates flames in a swastika-like arrangement, inside which it disappears into the water". [26]

The bodies of these horses are insubstantial: that of the *Ceffyl-dŵr* melts in clouds and in fog. [27] The dead beast loses all consistency, softens and becomes a mass like "a heap of starch". [28] The cadaver of an *Each-Uisge*, on the Isle of Mull, resembled a "soft mass, like a Medusa". [29] The skin itself is described as "adhesive". [30]

In Scandinavia, stories of lake-serpents also contain this detail of a sticky body; a man and a horse who escape one, are "covered in slime". [31] A Norwegian fisherman attacked by one of these monsters, stuck a fishing rod into its body. The man recounted later: "The serpent had soft and flaccid flesh, and the rod penetrated it with each blow". [32] Nessie is said to possess a "glistening" skin. [33] At Loch Ness, in 1943, Commander Russell Flint, in a Royal Navy high-speed launch, struck an object he interpreted as a "soft and squelchy" living mass. [34]

2.2

THE MANED LOVER

The fleeting contours of the water-horse escape from us, submerging in the many stories about it. It is difficult to find any consistency among the anecdotes which can be given the status of testimony. The first specialist on the topic of sea-serpents, Professor Oudemans, noted a tradition current around the river basin of Garry. This geographical feature is called the "Children's Basin" in memory of two youngsters who had had the imprudence to mount a 'pony' which had come from the deep. The beast took them to the river bottom. [1] The Dutch scholar seemed to take this for a real event, but it is in fact a folkloric theme, variants of which attribute this style of drowning to the *Each-Uisge* of Lochs Pityoulish, Scaven and many others. [2]

In the French provinces which provided the majority of Québec's settlers – Britanny, Normandy, and Poitou – there is common knowledge of these mysterious drowning horses whose backs can elongate to carry a whole troop of children to the abyss. [3] There are, in fact, two themes combined: the abduction of men and children to kill them or devour them; and the abduction of women for sexual misadventures. In the first case, water-horses are held responsible for lakeside disappearances, and there are many in mountainous countries. At Loch Barrachan, in Sutherland, for example, only the clothes of two missing fishermen were found on the banks, surrounded by large hoof prints. [4]

In the second category, for example, the *Each-Uisge* said to inhabit a loch on the Isle of Skye specialises in kidnapping beautiful girls who pass close to his lair, so that his pursuit would flatter the coyness of his victim, *if* she escaped him. [5] The character of this supernatural lover demonstrates a dimension up to now not studied in the water-horse. In the guise of *a hairy*

A fearsome kelpie, its aquatic nature betrayed by its webbed feet, has chased a young girl who was returning home after dark after spending time with her lover. She reaches the safety of a threshold marked with a cross of rowan branches, and swoons. The frustrated 'Spirit of the Waters' has to make do with her shoe. The sexual nature of the theme is thinly disguised. From W.C. Hazlitt, *Dictionary of faiths and folklore* **(1905).** [Fortean Picture Library.]

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26 ■ K. Blind, 'Scottish, Shetlandic and Germanic water tales,' in *Contemporary Review* 1881.

27 ■ M. Trevelyan 1909.

28 ■ L. Spence 1948.

29 ■ J.G. Campbell 1900.

30 ■ K. Briggs 1976.
See also: F. Thompson 1976.

31 ■ Elisabeth Skjelsvik, 'Norwegian lake and sea monsters,' in *Norveg Folkelivsgransking*, Oslo, vol 7 (1960).

32 ■ T.Å. Bringsvaerd 1979.

33 ■ T. Dinsdale 1961.

34 ■ F.W. Holiday 1973, p178 & p189.

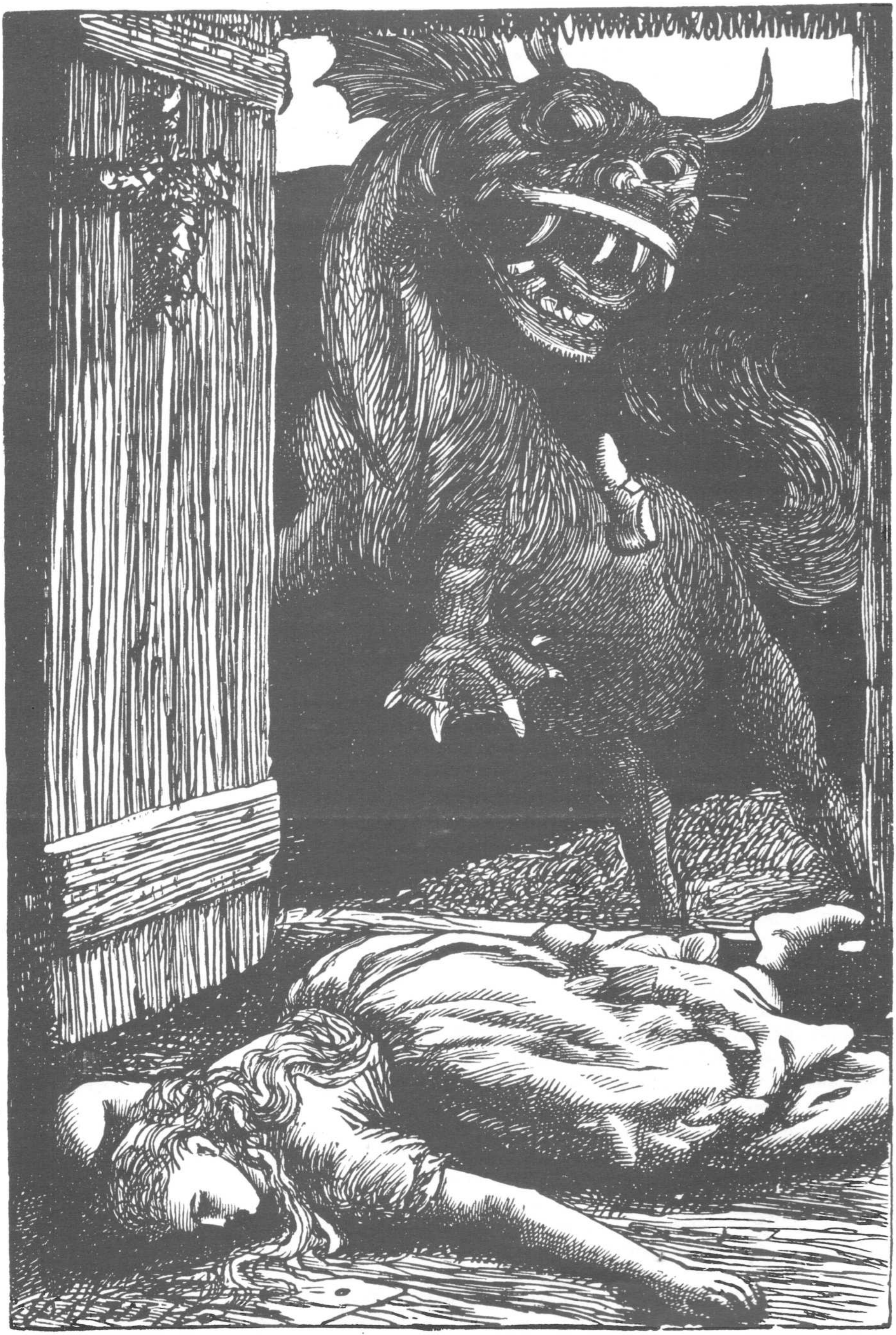
1 ■ A.C. Oudemans, 'Loch Ness monster,' in *Levende Natur*, Amsterdam, November 1934.

2 ■ K. Briggs 1976.

3 ■ R.M. Robertson 1961.

4 ■ P. Sébillot 1968 B, vol 2.

5 ■ O.F. Swire 1963.



man, the Kelpie loves to jump into the saddle of a solitary rider and squeeze him to the point of suffocation. [6] In Wales the *Ceffyl-dŵr* jumps out of the river, like a frog, and grips his victim by the shoulders, squeezing him to death. [7] In the form of a goat, he kicks the body of a passer-by so that the bruises are visible for a week. [8]

SIMILAR LEGENDS OF "BACK-RIDING" WEREWOLVES FROM WESTERN EUROPE

All these deeds are typical of a mythical *nightmare* animal. The demons of the night suffocate the sleeper in the form of hairy or sticky beasts. One of the most widespread of these creatures was the *nocturnal* horse-demon, the night-mare. The file collected by Ernest Jones [9] permits us to connect the mounting of the water-horse carrying the young girl, to sexual experiences; "*the demon of the night has mounted*", people said in Germany, to designate nocturnal emissions.

MONSTER AS EROTIC-FUNEREAL CARRIER TO OTHER WORLD

"THE BALLAD OF LEONORE" BY EMILE VERNET, 1839

The first version of the mounting of *Each-Uisge*, the drowning race, shows a knight riveted to the flanks of his mount, literally glued to it. [10] Anne Ross has found the original of this motif in an odd Irish story: the horrible grey pony which plunges into the sea with 28 heroes stuck to its dorsal suckers, abducting them to the Other World. [11] Sexual fantasies and rides to the Beyond appear as two parallel types of ecstatic participation in the erotic-funereal double nature of the Nordic centaur.

2.3

HERDS OF MONSTERS AND THEIR OFFSPRING

The image of these lake monsters is open to many interpretations. It is difficult to determine where the fiction ends and the true testimony begins, because any account may be simply the projection of stereotypical ritual scenes. If our research hypothesis proves correct, the uniqueness of each testimony will disappear. That which one individual claims to have seen at a certain place cannot reproduce itself, *in its general form*, in other times and other places.

A strange account of Elzéar Sirois permits us to broach this subject. Early one morning, when he was hunting at Lake Pohénégamook, with a thick fog covering its shores, he saw three large beasts – which he took to be "mooses" – emerge from the greyish waters. One of them suddenly started to swim and disappeared. In Scotland, in 1893, Ewen MacMillan of South Uist, was searching near Loch Duwait for one of his fillies, when he came upon an animal which, because of the mist, he took to be his mare. "Suddenly the beast started to emit horrible cries, which frightened not only MacMillan but also the other horses at pasture near there. They took off and stopping running only when they reached the farm." [1]

Traditional accounts from the Scottish Highlands emphasise this "horrible cry" of the water-horse. There are many anecdotes in a similar vein, one of the most singular of which is attributed to a Sutherland woman, Mary Falconer. In 1934, she found herself on the bank of Loch Garbet Beag

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6 ■ O.F. Swire 1952.

7 ■ K. Briggs 1976.

8 ■ M. Trevelyan 1909.

9 ■ E. Jones 1931.

10 ■ K. Briggs 1976.

11 ■ A. Ross 1967.

1 ■ J.L. Campbell and T. Hale 1968.

observing a troop of ponies grazing on the shore. As she approached one, which she thought to be her neighbour's beast, she saw that *its neck was garlanded with algae.* She realised it was the fearful *Each-Uisge.* As soon as the rest of the troop noticed her presence, the thirteen ponies left at a gallop and plunged into the lake. Shore-dwellers of this loch believe that it shelters, in its lower depths, an entire group of water-horses. [**2**] Here we have a completely realistic account of the sort that Nessie-hunters are most fond. [**3**]

However, the verification of a sensational story is only an appearance; the mark by which Mary Falconer recognised the true nature of the 'pony' is a traditional sign, which regularly features in the legends of the water-horse-lover. For example: a woman discovers with whom she is dealing while combing her lover's mane; its tangled hairs are knotted with algae peculiar to the lochs (the "*Liobhagach an locha*"). [**4**] Mary Falconer's adventure reproduces a *stereotype.* The ecstatic character of her encounter with the ponies is further confirmed by her status as a "seer". She foresees burials. [**5**]

Another document confirms the plurality and consistency of this type of experience. A peasant of Zachrastany, in Bohemia, saw some beautiful horses in a pasture near a stream. He wanted *to mount one of them but saw that the animal had no bottom lip.* The horse began to laugh: "You are lucky! If you had mounted on my back I would have drowned you." *With these words all the horses galloped into the brook.* [**6**] The horse without a lower jaw is another extremely archaic image in Celtic mythology. This Czech peasant narrowly avoided the fate of the water-horse's rider. We find the essential motifs are also shared by the scene reported by Mary Falconer.

In our three examples, a traditional symbol, and *not chance,* governs the disclosure of the beast's true identity at the last minute. Detached from the traditional framework, into which they fit so well, these stories can be – and are often considered to be – true adventures. F.W. Holiday integrated such a story into his last work. Investigating in Ireland, he received the confidences of an old soldier, who recounted some of his memories. Fourteen years earlier, along Lough Shanakeever, in rainy weather, the veteran saw a "beautiful black stallion" circling round a mare. When the witness approached, the beast disappeared into the foaming river. A few days later the mare dropped her young. [**7**]

Holiday does not make the connection between the visit of the water-horse and the birth of the young animal. However, the *Each-Uisge* was suspected of mating with the mares of farms and procreating colts with drooping ears. [**8**] It seems that the old soldier's shyness inhibited his story-telling. These bastards of aquatic monsters have half-brothers, procreated by the water-bull, the *Tairbh-Uisge* of the Highlands and of Ireland. It is said they are often seen grazing among cows. It is described as a small beast with a smooth, velvety skin. The calves are called *Corc-chluasask* (split ears) because they only have half of each ear. [**9**] On the island of Skye, calves with deformed ears are killed at birth, for they are thought to bring misfortune to the herd. [**10**]

ROBIN WOOFIT: THE "FIRST THOUGHT" MOTIF IN PARANORMAL REPORTAGE — DOES IT ACCIDENTALLY RECREATE THIS LEGENDARY MOTIF OF THE DISCOVERY OF THE MAGIC IMPOSTER?

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2 ■ R.M. Robertson 1961.

3 ■ A similarly 'realistic' case occurred in November 1984, when two bird-hunters claimed they saw a pair of unidentified animals, "larger than horses" emerge from the waters of Lake Kleifárvvatn, in Iceland. At first the men thought they were "rocks", but they played "like dogs", leaving "hoof" prints on the shore. After a while the creatures re-entered the water and "swam like seals". *Fortean Times* N° 43 (Spring 1985), p25.

4 ■ K. Briggs 1976.

5 ■ R.M. Robertson 1961.

6 ■ M. de Vaux-Phalipau 1939.

7 ■ F.W. Holiday 1968.

8 ■ In reviewing Celtic tales of fairy animals, Patrick Logan refers to the general belief in their fecund matings with terrestrial stock. As an interesting illustration of the malleability of myth he writes: "I have heard that the ancestor of the Connemara breed of ponies was a stallion which came ashore from one of the wrecks of the Spanish Armada ships, but this is only a version of the old legend of the sea-horses." A similar story "can still be heard" on the Scottish island of Mull. (Logan 1981, p131.)

9 ■ R.M. Robertson 1961.

10 ■ O.F. Swire 1952.
J.F. Campbell notes that "the progeny of the water-bull can be recognized by... the shape of the ears." (1890, vol 4, p304f) In the Scottish Highlands, this varies from small, rounded, split ears to no ears at all. The *Crodh Mara*, of fairy-cattle (which also had water associations) were "crop-eared". (Briggs 1976, p117.) Traditionally, Irish water-cattle are white with distinctive red ears. (P. Logan 1981, p128.)

Could the "cow without ears" described by Mrs. Desbiens be the Québecois relative of the *Tairbh–Uisge*?

2:4

THE MYTHICAL LANDSCAPE OF LAKE POHÉNÉGAMOOK

"*... the incomprehensible marvels of the unfathomable Lake Wetter, above which no bird can fly without immediately being frozen...*"

Thomas Nashe, *The Terrors of the Night*, 1594.

"*The aspect of a lake in the evening sometimes produces, from a distance, a singular optical illusion; it's as if a prodigious abyss, pierces the globe from one point to another, allowing us to see the sky through the earth.*"

Victor Hugo, *Han of Iceland*.

The resemblance of Champ, Ponik, and Ogopogo to the aquatic creatures of European mythology prompted us to look into whether other elements of our inquiry were open to similar associations. Bit by bit, it became evident to us that not only the monsters, but also the lakes which shelter them, offer points of comparison with their transatlantic models. Let us compare eight of these features shared by the lakes of Québec, and between them and some European lakes.

DARK WATER

Several of Québec's monster-haunted lakes have water which is very dark. Lake Pohénégamook has "brown water", Maskinongé and Champlain have water which is "cloudy grey". [**1**] In Scotland, the peat from the surrounding hills gives Loch Ness its sombre colour. The divers who have tried to discover the monster in the Scottish lake, as at Pohénégamook, have met great difficulties due to this opacity. A diver-photographer from the *National Geographic Magazine* had to use floodlights because, at 40 feet from the bottom "you would have thought you were in a coal mine". [**2**]

Likewise, three divers from Maine armed themselves with similar apparatus at Pohénégamook in May 1980. [**3**] Throughout Europe there is considered to be a link between the darkness of the water of the lake and two other characteristics: its unfathomability, and the existence of a monster in its depths. The Krottensee, a small dark lake situated on the shady side of a valley near Salzburg, was, according to these traditions, unfathomable. [**4**]

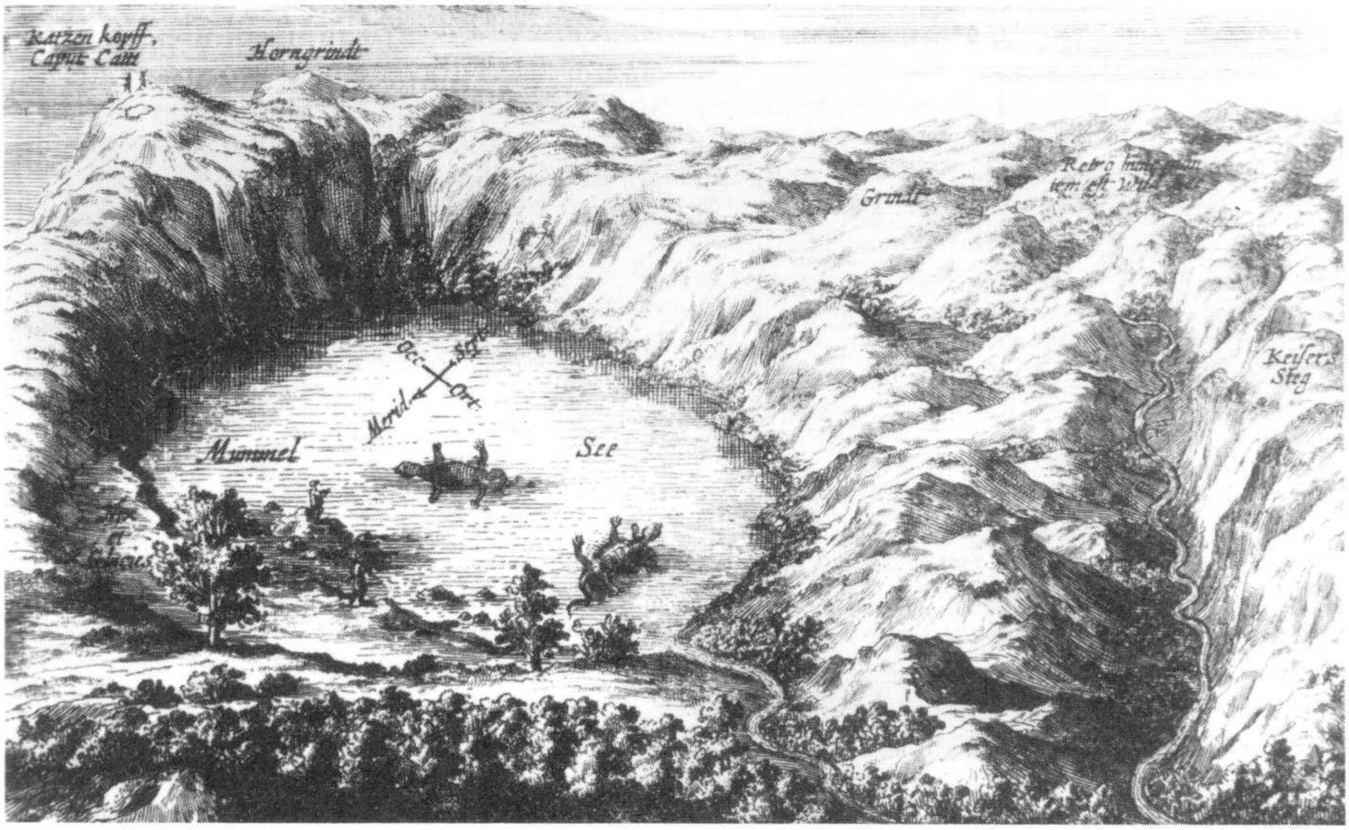
Everyone who ponders the mysteries of the Mummelsee, in the Black Forest, has remarked upon its colour. In 1664, the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, in his *Mundus subterraneus*, related the story of the emergence of a monster from its "waters, black

1 ■ J. Danziger 1981.

2 ■ W.S. Ellis, 'Loch Ness: the lake and the legend,' in *National Geographic Magazine*, vol 151, N°6, 1977.

3 ■ B. Bérubé, 'Des Américains perceront-ils le mystère du lac Pohénégamook?', in *Saint-Laurent Echo*, 4 June 1977.

4 ■ R. Freisauff 1880.



The Mummelsee, a lake in Germany's Black Forest, with the floating cadavres of two dragons. From A. Kircher's ***Mundus subterraneus*** **(1664).** [Fortean Picture Library]

as pitch". [**5**] His contemporary, Christoph von Grimmelshausen, to whom one owes most of the curious observations on this lake, remarked: "Because of its unimaginable depth, the water becomes coal black". [**6**] These conditions, reinforced by the presumed habitation of Nessie in an underwater cavern, have led certain legends to present the monsters of Loch Ness as blind and albino. [**7**] Some of the fauna of caverns, familiar to spelunkers, are indeed colourless, such as *Proteus*, the battrachian of the underground rivers of Carniole, and the crayfish living underground in the United States. [**8**]

THE BOTTOMLESS LAKE

According to the information gleaned by journalists in 1977, Lake Pohénégamook was said by many shore-dwellers to be "unfathomable". [**9**] The same beliefs are held at Lake Maskinongé, where the sounding went as far as 150 feet (45 m) without touching the bottom. Other expanses of water on the North American continent having this reputation are Lake Okanagan (the haunt of Ogopogo–Naitaka) [**10**]; Lake Chellan, hidden in the mountains of Washington State; and both Crescent and Crater Lakes in Oregon. [**11**] Europe furnishes numerous parallels. For instance, in Sweden there is a lake which has been called *"Bottenlosen"* (the lake without a bottom) since time immemorial. [**12**] In Lower Saxony, near Golmbach, there are gulfs known as the "unfathomables" by the shore-dwellers.

By way of a suggestive, but doubtful, etymology, Grimmelshausen claims to derive the name "Mummelsee" from the German word signifying "masked" or "hidden". [**13**] This suggests the cryptic nature of this lake. At Black Lake, in

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5 ■ A. Kircher 1664-1665.

6 ■ C. von Grimmelshausen 1660.

7 ■ O.F. Swire 1963.

8 ■ C.E. Mohr, 'Exploring America underground,' in *National Geographic Magazine*, vol 125, N°6, 1964.

9 ■ *Echo de la Rivière-du-Loup*, 10 May 1977.

10 ■ T. Dinsdale 1961.

11 ■ H.A. Person, 'Bottomless lakes of the Pacific northwest,' in *Western Folklore*, October 1960.

12 ■ *ibidem*.

13 ■ C. von Grimmelshausen 1660.

Black Lack, Bohemia: "A stone thrown here falls eternally"

Bohemia, it is said: "A stone thrown here falls eternally". [14] The Traunsee of Austria, the lake of Seefeld (Tyrol), the Walchensee in Bavaria, the Schwartz and the Wildsee in Switzerland, are all said to be unfathomable. [15] In France, the *crater lakes* of the Auvergne are noticeably consistent with this traditional belief; principally Lake Pavin, "with water so black that, it is said, fish cannot live there". [16]

Unfathomability, then, is a condition favourable to the existence of a monster, according to the European–American tradition. This is true at Loch Ness, where, it is said, there is "an abyss, deeper than any other abyss in all of Scotland". [17] On the other side of the Atlantic, the unfathomable abysses of Lake Payette in Idaho are said to shelter a 12-metre-long serpent with a crocodile head, the famous "Slimy Slim". [18] In the 17th century, it was believed that one could go to the centre of the earth, or to the Antipodes, through the Mummelsee, where, according to Kircher, a "terrifying monster" was said to dwell. [19] Another monster swims in the Traunsee; the lake of Walchensee is said to shelter a "giant whale"; and that of Seefeld, a dragon. [20] We find our familiar "fish as long as tree trunks" in the Walensee in Switzerland, and the "sea-bull" in the Schwarzsee. [21] A monster, unfathomability, and another feature are associated in this complex: the lake does not give up its dead.

THE LAKE THAT DOES NOT RENDER UP ITS DROWNED

What people tell us of Pohénégamook – referring to the accidental drowning of three victims at the camping grounds, in 1975 – is that the lake does not return those who drown in it. Our informants indicated that the place of their disappearance was the abyss situated under the "Montagne de la Croix", where the lake "enters under the mountain". That is the place where the shore-dwellers also locate the monster's cavern. When the bodies of the drowned cannot be found at Lake Maskinongé, they are said to have been sucked into underwater grottoes. Similarly at Loch Ness there is a belief that the lake refuses to return the bodies of its drowned; Otta Swire shows that there is an association between the abyss in the bottom of the lake "*where all lost things go*" and the mouth of the monster. People say that "*the thing takes them to the bottom*". [22]

Otta Swire heard, as a child, the legend "of an unshapely black mass dreaming of evil at the bottom of the lake". The dreams of the beast were realised shortly after the writer had evoked this maleficent being: someone drowned and the body was never recovered. [23] Nessie has also been held responsible for the disappearances of swimmers. The lake could not return them because their tomb was the cavernous mouth of the "beast of the lake". At Walensee, in Switzerland, the lake-serpents swallowed the drowned, according to tradition [24], just as at Blue-Sea Lake the Horse's Head is said to have done on at least one occasion. In a similar fashion, there are certain relationships between the stories of fishermen at Lake

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14 ■ H. Watzlik 1921.

15 ■ J–N. Sepp 1876; and *Schweizerisches archiv für volkskunde*, vol 25, 1925.

See also: Hühnerkopf, 'Unergründlich,' in H. Bächtold–Stäubli 1929–1936, vol.8.

The psychoanalist Marie Bonaparte attempted an interpretation of this 'unfathomablility' by taking different examples, amongst them that of *Rothsee*(or Rootsee), near Lucerne in Switzerland, which we will discuss later in Chapter 2, Section 2. However worthy this may be, the exercise was too restricted to individual psychology to merit a long commentary. See Marie Bonaparte, 'La légende des eaux sans fond', in *Revue Francaise de Psychanalyse*, vol 14, 1950.

16 ■ A. Lauras–Pourrat 1973; and M. Aimé and J–P. Clébert 1968.

17 ■ O.F. Swire 1963.

18 ■ *Time Magazine*, New York, 21 August 1944.

See also: H.A. Person, 'Bottomless lakes of the Pacific northwest,' in *Western Folklore*, October 1960; and P. Costello 1974.

19 ■ A. Kircher 1664–1665.

See also: C. von Grimmelhausen 1660.

20 ■ J–N. Sepp 1876.

21 ■ *Schweizerisches archiv für volkskunde*, vol 25, 1925.

22 ■ O.F. Swire 1963.

23 ■ *ibidem*.

Similarly, the statistics of drownings at Pohénégamook could be "abnormally high and an astonishing number of bodies may never have been found." Yves Pagé, 'Loch Ness, P.Q: Monstre, es-tu la?', in *Actualité*, October 1976.

In fact this is not true, but additional proof of the status of legend masquerading as fact.

24 ■ *Schweizerisches archiv für volkskunde*, vol 25, 1925.

Superior – "*Lake Superior never gives up its dead*" – and the presence of a great serpent in this important expanse of water. [25]

Originally, accidental drowning was replaced by voluntary human sacrifices to the beast of the water. The Walensee is said to have demanded such a victim every year [26], and children are said to have been thrown to the monster of Loch Ness in wicker baskets. [27] Similar human sacrifices to lake spirits were confirmed in Estonia by reports from the Jesuit College of Dorpat in the 16th century, which mentioned children thrown into the lake near Otepää. One chronicle records: "*There were some lakes populated with spectres, and the shore-dwellers, in order to appease them, had the custom of throwing cattle to them or even shedding human blood. We condemned this superstition and sprinkled the lake with holy water and planted crosses by them. In this way we hoped to bring all of the terrors to an end, and to chase the phantoms away.*" [28]

Among the Slavs, the water-spirit which fed upon the cadavers of the drowned [29] was said to have been originally a drowned person himself. In old Polish, "*Topielec*", or the "spirits of the waters", had previously meant "*drowned*". [30] *The drowned person became a lake monster.* A legend from Bohemia tells of the transformation into an aquatic serpent of a man condemned in this way. [31] The calf-shaped monster of the lake Ostro-Wittchen (Western Prussia) was "the incarnation of the souls of the drowned". [32]

We owe the most extraordinary descriptions of the spirit of the waters, in a female form taking away her human tribute, to an Austrian writer of the 18th century, Otto Graber zu Stein. In his *Monthly Meetings in the Kingdom of the Spirit* [33], he wrote about one of the most mysterious lakes of Salzkammergut, the Traunsee, which, according to legend, has no bottom [34] and demands a human sacrifice every year. [35] Graber zu Stein describes *'the Lady of Lake Traun'*: "People have assured me that several thousand men have seen her, at times in the middle of the lake, and at times at the waterfall, at midday or under the light of the moon. I myself spoke with several persons who reported that this woman had emerged from the waters and had pursued them with her long hair floating in the wind. Frightened, they had tried to run away." [36]

"People say that this lady of the lake often appeared mounted on a water-dragon resembling a skinned horse. But during the last several years, the lady of the lake has appeared alone, which leaves us to suppose that her mount was an amphibian, a real beast, which the water-spirit made use of during certain periods. The shore-dwellers of Lake Traun assure us with unanimity that, within human memory, more than 100 people have drowned there..." Likewise, the fishermen of Traunsee say that certain of their colleagues, on different occasions, "when they were swimming or repairing their nets on the rivers, had been caught by this woman and dragged into the abyss, without any trace returning to the surface". [37]

The 'Lady of Lake Traun', who appeared astride a sea-horse, is a "Mistress of the lake and of the aquatic beasts", [38] whose anger has turned against the fishermen. Similar

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25 ■ R.M. Dorson 1952.

26 ■ *Schweizerisches archiv für volkskunde*, vol 25, 1925.

27 ■ O.F. Swire 1963.

28 ■ E. Kurtz 1925; and O. Loorits 1951, vol 2.

29 ■ G. Alexinsky, 'Mythologie Slav,' in *Mythologie générale*, Larousse, Paris, 1935.

30 ■ W.M. Kalak, 1935.

31 ■ O. Tobler 1911.

32 ■ F.S. Bassett 1885.

33 ■ O.G. zu Stein 1731.

34 ■ A. Depiny 1932.

35 ■ F.S. Bassett 1885.

36 ■ O.G. zu Stein 1731, vol 2.

37 ■ S.B. Walther 1731.

38 ■ Lutz Röhrich, 'Europäische Wildgeistersagen', in *Rheinisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde*, vol 10, 1960, pp79-162. See also Appendix 5.

figures are known in America, where *Sa-Yin*, the Master of Fishes at Toba-Pilaga (Gran Chaco) appears as a man with long black hair, astride a mythic *horse*. [**39**]

The detail of the skinned beast reappears in a tradition from Allgäu, where the dragon of the waters of Frauensee, near Teutte, appears "as a sort of skinned horse". [**40**]

THE TERRIFIED DIVERS

At Pohénégamook, the deep-sea divers who descended to look for the corpse of a child "were frightened". At Lake Maskinongé, frogmen who came "to search for the drowned" were frightened by the "enormous size of the fish". A similar fear among divers occurred at Lake Saint-François, Memphrémagog, and Massawippi. Likewise, at Loch Ness the deep-sea divers "searching for the body of a tourist" resurfaced in great haste and refused to go down again, for fear "of the enormous eels which encircled their air tanks". [**41**]

In these examples, presented as realistic reports, the search for cadavers was the object of the dive. In five Québec lakes, these cadavers were never found. The shore-dwellers who told us these stories have believed that this fear undergone by the divers was *the price to pay for violating the taboo on recovering the victims of the lake*; the lake having the "right" to reclaim "its" dead. This hypothesis is confirmed if we consider that most of the "unfathomable lakes" established their traditions in relation to divers well before the technological development of independent deep-water diving. The imprudent have descended to *fathom the unfathomable* in a "glass diving bell", as at the Walchensee, or in a barrel, as at the bottom of Bodensee (the lake of Constance). [**42**] There are two other possible occurrences: either the unhappy divers return, babbling and terrified, speaking of monstrous fish which have menaced them; or they speak of a sepulchral voice crying to them: "If you fathom me, I will swallow you". Sometimes the diver doesn't come up at all, as at Walchensee, where a "*giant whale*" swallowed him. Here, as in certain French versions, the hapless diver is identified as a man "condemned to death", an offering to the beasts of the depths.

In Lake Angoumois, tradition holds that, in the past, a French queen put a *condemned man* into a *candle-lit cage* to explore the watery abyss. The man recounted "that he saw only horrible rocks and *monstrous fish*es, and that if he had not been brought up promptly he would be dead from cold and fear". [**43**] The encounters of the "giant whale", the "glass bell" and the "candle-lit cage" have a medieval model in the *Legende d'Alexandre*, written by the Burgundian, John Vauquelin, around 1450. Its hero descends into the sea through a glass barrel illuminated with candles, which frighten the "giant whales". [**44**] The Hindu King Souran, and the Russian hero Sadko, both knew of similar bathyspheres. [**45**]

Here we have a stereotype of the underwater encounter with the monster in which one is protected by a simple glass apparatus: from the glass bell of Alexander the Great to the

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39 ■ O. Zerries 1954.

40 ■ K. Reiser 1894, vol.1.

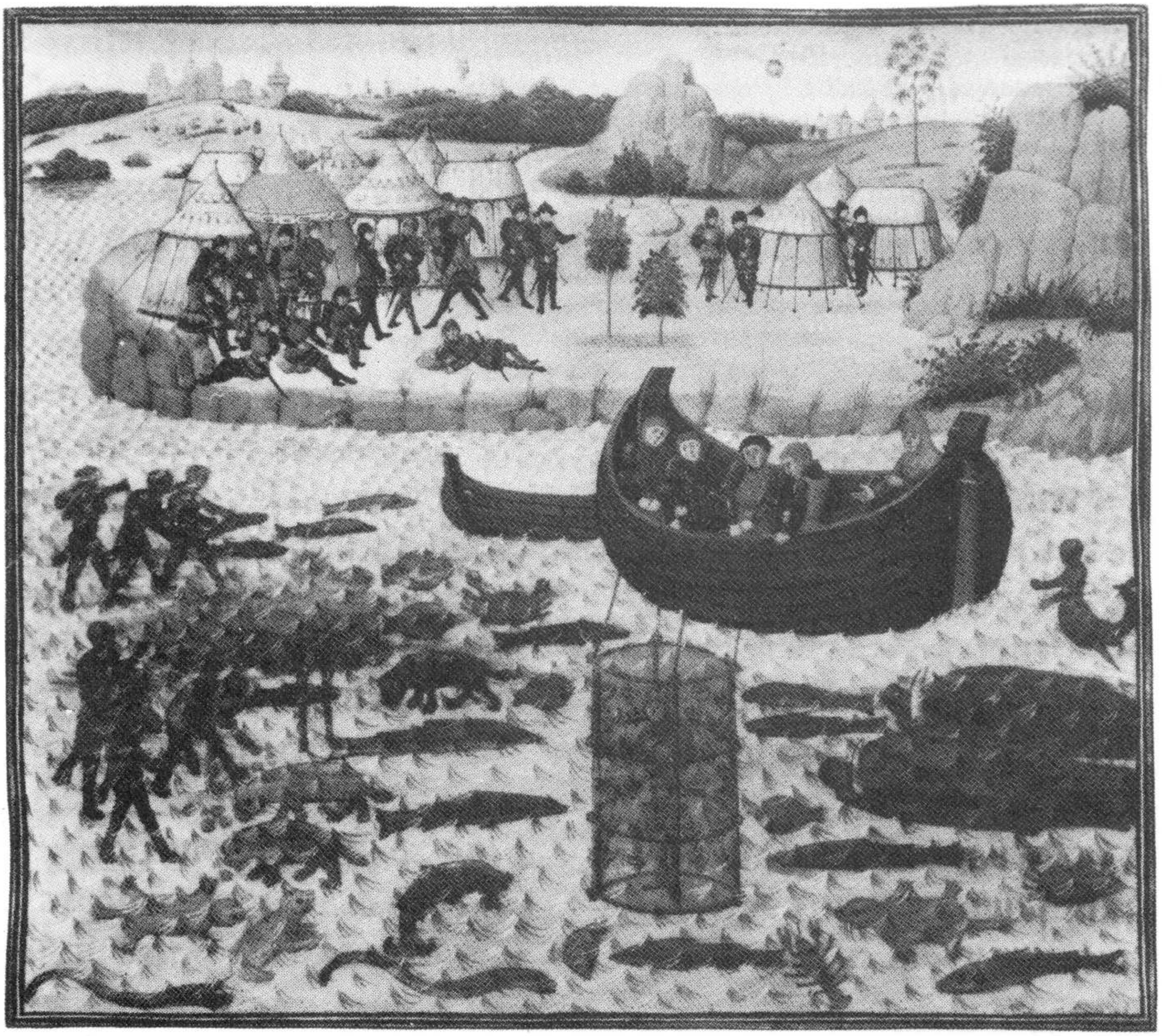
41 ■ O.F. Swire 1963.

42 ■ J-N. Sepp 1876.

43 ■ A.Hugo 1835.

44 ■ A. Warburg, 'Luftschiff und Tauchboot in der mittelalterlichen Voistellungswelt,' in *Gesammelste Schriften*, Leipzig, vol 1, 1932.

45 ■ P. Sébillot 1886, vol.2.



Alexander observes the ichthyophagi – "fish eaters", sometimes shown as hairy river dwellers, or as in this case, underwater wild folk – from a glass barrel illuminated with candles. Among the fearsome creatures of the depths is included a mermaid (mid-right). Detail of a manuscript illumination from Jean Vauquelin's *Legende d'Alexandre* **(apx 1480-1450)** [Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris ©]

diver's mask, to the windows of *Nautilus* in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. We think that at Pohénégamook, as at Lake Maskinongé, the attempt to fathom the unfathomable has been considered as a sacrilege, a violation of a taboo, which leads to tragic consequences, not only for the divers – "If you fathom me, I will swallow you." – but also for the entire community. When the intruders went down into Lake Seefeld, said to be haunted by a dragon, a voice from the depths cried: "If you sound the lake, I will engulf the entire city of Seefeld". [**46**]

THE SUCKING CURRENTS

These "strong currents" were attested to at the time Mel Corey dived at Pohénégamook in 1980. [**47**] At Lake Maskinongé these "currents, coming from the underground grottoes", were said to have sucked down the drowned, just as the "underground river" of Lake Saint-François drew them down. In Washington State, near Tacoma, Lake Wapato is also said to have "unfathomable wells" in its centre from which icy waters spread, paralysing the swimmer. [**48**] These traditions spring from widespread association of a dangerous whirlpool with the presence of a monster. In the Richmond Gulf,

46 ■ J-N. Sepp 1876.

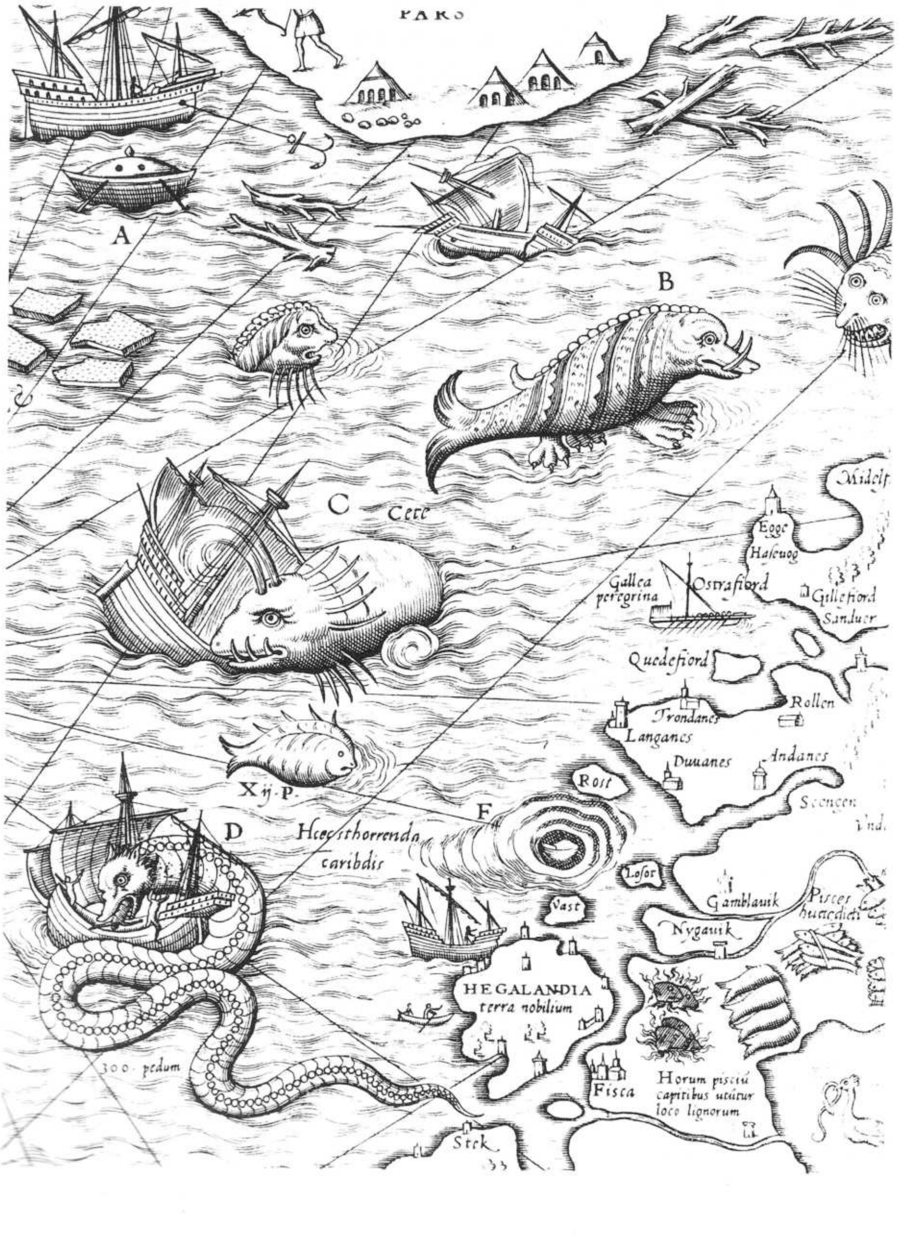
47 ■ *Saint-Laurent Echo* 4 June 1980.

48 ■ H.A. Person, 'Bottomless lakes of the Pacific northwest,' in *Western Folklore*, October 1960.

Hudson's Bay, water-demons wait at the bottom of a large eddy, to suck down the boats. [49]

The sea-serpent with long coils is called, in the Gaelic of the Scottish Highlands, *"cuartag mhor a chuaim"* ("the great whirlpool of the ocean"). [50] A legend about St. Patrick explains that the waves are produced by serpents. [51] Sacrifices to the serpent and to the whirlpool amount to the same thing: children are thrown into a whirlpool to appease Tlaloc, a serpent-headed Mexican god. [52] Whirlpools themselves are personified monsters, for example *"Wirbel"* and *"Strudel"*, the two eddies of the Danube. It is even possible to compare the fabled abyss of Loch Ness, "where lost things are said to go", to the *Chareckin*, the *great whirlpool* of the tribes of northern California, into which the dead are said to disappear. [53]

The Swedish archbishop, Olaus Magnus, in his *History of Northern Peoples*, speaks of the great whirlpool of the Norwegian seas, the Maelström, "where men and boats are broken and smashed so thoroughly that they are completely unrecognisable". For this 16th century prelate, as for the shore-dwellers of Lake Maskinongé today, whirlpools emanate from the underwater grottoes: "There the sea is far more furious because there are enormous caverns". Olaus Magnus also links


FARO
A
B
C
Cete
Midelf
Egge
Hafeuog
Gallea peregrina
Ostrafiord
Gilleford
Sanduer
Quedefiord
Rollen
Trondanes
Langanes
Duuanes
Andanes
Xij. P.
Rost
F
Scencen
Vnd.
D
Horrenda caribdis
Losot
Vast
Gamblauik
Pisces huttedicti
Nygauik
HEGALANDIA terra nobilium
300 pedum
Fisca
Horum piscium capitibus utuntur loco lignorum
Stek

A portion of Olaus Magnus' *Carta marina* (1539) in which he sites the Maelström (marked F) in the area of the Lofoten Islands off Norway's north-western coast.

Also in the picture are a 300-foot sea-serpent swamping a boat (marked D), and a gaily striped walrus (marked B). [Fortean Picture Library].

49 ■ C.M. Skinner 1899.

50 ■ R.M. Robertson 1961.

51 ■ F.S. Bassett 1885.

52 ■ *ibidem*.

53 ■ H. Bancroft 1875, vol.3.

the presence of a monster to the unfathomability of the waters: "In the Norwegian sea there are monstrous fishes *because of the depth of the water*, which is such that the bottom cannot be found". [54]

The Nordic whirlpool was also considered to be caused by a passage piercing the earth from one part to another, according to certain traditions which Edgar Allan Poe interpreted thus: "Kircher and others imagined that, at the middle of the Maelström canal, there is an abyss which cuts through the globe and ends in some far distant region". [55] This *sucking gully* haunts the imagination. According to legends, although contradicted by the findings of Dr. Ballard, the rocky bottom of Loch Ness has the form of a 'V'. [56] Likewise, the "unfathomable" Darmsee of Westphalia is said to be cut in the form of a "funnel directed towards the bottom". [57] Such "funnels" are whirlpool-like structures which engulf things and people.

UNDERWATER CAVERNS

The inhabitants of Saint-Éleuthère remark on the existence, under the "Montagne de la Croix" at Pointe de la Boucanée [Buccaneer Point], of an underwater cavern where "the monster holes up and gets its oxygen". [58] At Lake Maskinongé, the largest *maskinongé* (some of them "as big as a boat") are believed not to come to the surface because they live in the hypothetical caverns at the bottom. The legend at Loch Ness maintains that there is a "great cavern" hidden below the banks, where the "monsters, blind, white and viscous", keep themselves. [59] Likewise, at Trois-Lacs, one of the reasons that the shore-dwellers mention a cavern is to explain the rarity of the sightings.

LINDA DÉGH:
'ANTI-LEGEND'

At Pohénégamook, this cavern thesis "clears up" the mysteries of Ponik's breathing. At Loch Ness it is also used to explain the absence of monster carcasses, which are said to rot in the grottoes, "unaffected by the currents". [60] In fact, even if the actual existence of such a refuge is extremely improbable at Loch Ness [61], its mention is a stereotype. The dragon inhabits underground regions: "The sea dragon inhabits the rivers and *the pits in the earth* where it hides itself". [62] The description, "beast of the cavern", evokes an invisible monster, whose repulsive stickiness is felt before it is seen. *"Lou Carcolh"*, the legendary snail-like monster of the town of Hastingue, in the French department of Les Landes, had his nest, according to one tradition, "in a vast and dark cavern, above which the city is built".

This description recalls certain portraits of Nessie. [63] "An enormous snail... an unworldly beast, a sort of long, viscous, and hairy serpent, which, quickly emerging from its hole, wraps itself around the imprudent with its horrible tentacles, snatches him into its shell, as high and deep as a house, and makes a mouthful of it. Such is the conviction of the local inhabitants." [64] One can legitimately call this cavern a "foundation cavern", like that upon which Rome was built. The monster lives *beneath* Hastingue, and the history of this city is based upon it, just as Saint-Éleuthère is *built* close to Ponik's lair.

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[54] O. Magnus 1555.

[55] E.A. Poe, *A descent into the Maelström*, 1841.

[56] W.S. Ellis, 'Loch Ness: the lake and the legend,' in *National Geographic Magazine*, vol 151, N°6, 1977.

[57] *Zeitschrift für deutsche mythologie*, vol 1, 1852.

[58] *Le Soleil* 3 May 1971.

[59] E.D. Baumann 1972.
At Lake Okanagan, The sudden disappearance of Ogopogo a few feet from the lake shore revives suspicions of underwater caves. *Sun*, 26 July 1976.

[60] E.D. Baumann 1972.

[61] R.P. Mackal 1976.

[62] 'Le Grand Propriétaire des Choses,' cited by F. d'Ayzac, 'Iconographie du dragon,' in *Revue de l'Art Chrétien*, 1864.

[63] F.W. Holiday 1968.

[64] V. Foix 1904.

At Pohénégamook, the situation of this cavern at the spot where the "lake enters under the mountain" permits the connection between this motif and that of the underground current unifying two distant lakes, of which the mouth is said to be the famous cavern.

Opposite: **Illustration by Harry Clarke for Edgar Allan Poe's story, 'A descent into the Mäelstrom'. Poe took many of his details from the writings of Pontoppidan, even locating the fearsome whirlpool off the Lofoten Islands of Norway.**

CONNECTING LAKES

According to the traditions reported by Corinne Normand-Hudon [65] Pohénégamook is said to be linked to another body of water, Lake Témiscouata, 30 kilometres to the north-east. The two bodies of water function like communicating vessels, always maintaining the same level. The same tradition exists in relation to Lakes Massawippi and Memphrémagog. To such an explanation is attributed the fact that Walchensee of Bavaria "does not augment or diminish" [66]. These connected lakes are also considered to be unfathomable. Another example is Lake Herrenwiese, attached by an underground river to the Mummelsee. [67]

Lake Titisee of the Black Forest is said, likewise, to be in communication with the unfathomable Ursee. [68] The same rapport is said to exist between the Wildsee and the Bühlersee of Allgäu [69], the Darmsee and the Moorkuhlen of Westphalia. [70] Sometimes the distances are immense, the two lakes even being thought to connect under the ocean. Loch Ness itself is said to correspond in this way, through a cyclopean network, with Lough Long in Ireland. [71] Lake Wetter in Sweden, already celebrated for its "incredible marvels" in the sixteenth century, is said to be coupled with the lake of Constance (Bodensee); in good weather the waters of one are said to be agitated by tempests raging on the other. [72]

2.5

THE EYE-OF-THE-SEA AND THE UNDERWATER HELL

An extremely interesting variant of the connected lakes is that of lakes communicating with the sea. The "hole" in Loch Ness is said to connect in this way with the ocean [1] as is the Walchensee of Bavaria, the Titisee of the Black Forest, and the lake at Frickenhausen [2]. In Brittany, a deep well connecting with the ocean, "the Eye of the sea", is said to constitute a door through which a future deluge might come, which might be postponed by the sacrifice of a child. [3] The geography of the problem is fairly simple, but to what sea is the "Eye of the sea" (Meeraugel), in a stream near Salzburg, connected? [4] The monstrous animals of the lakes furnish a clue; among them are *unicorn monsters*.

There are testimonies and legends concerning a horned monster: "the hippopotamus" with a white horn, of Dubh, in Ireland [5], the beast-with-a-little-horn of Dubhrachan, on the Isle of Skye [6] and the unicorn water-horse of Bohemia [7].

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65 ■ C. Normand-Hudon 1981.

66 ■ J-N. Sepp 1876.

67 ■ J. Kunzig 1930.

68 ■ *ibidem*.

69 ■ K. Reizer 1894, vol 1.

70 ■ *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Mythologie*, 1852, vol 1.

71 ■ O.F. Swire 1963.

72 ■ G. Schwab 1827.

1 ■ O.F. Swire 1963.

2 ■ J-N. Sepp 1876.

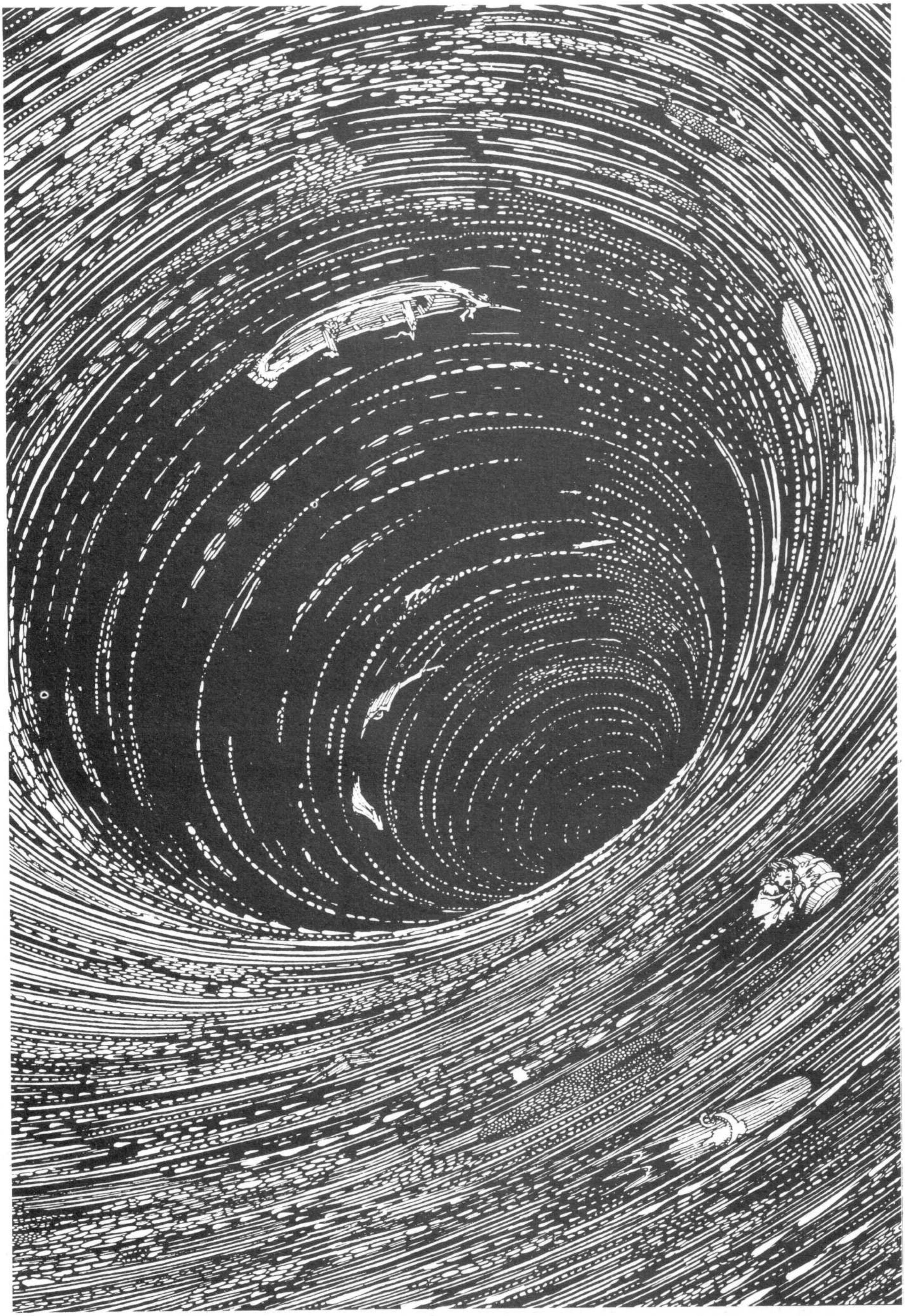
3 ■ J. Merrien 1969.

4 ■ R. Freisauff 1880.

5 ■ P. Costello 1975 [1974].

6 ■ O.F. Swire 1963.

7 ■ M. de Vaux-Phalipau 1939. A unicorn water-horse is illustrated on p255, Chapter 5.



Legends indicate unicorn monsters in Lower Saxony [**8**] and under the surface of the dark waters of the unfathomable Darmsee in Westphalia. [**9**] The unicorn fish figures on medieval frescoes in Zillis and in Tramin (Tyrol), where they are shown next to a mermaid. Medieval bestiaries considered the "*Monocheros Marinus*" to be the representation of a theriomorphic demon who swam in the "*mare saeculi*", the ocean surrounding the earth, according to ecclesiastical cosmogony. [**10**]

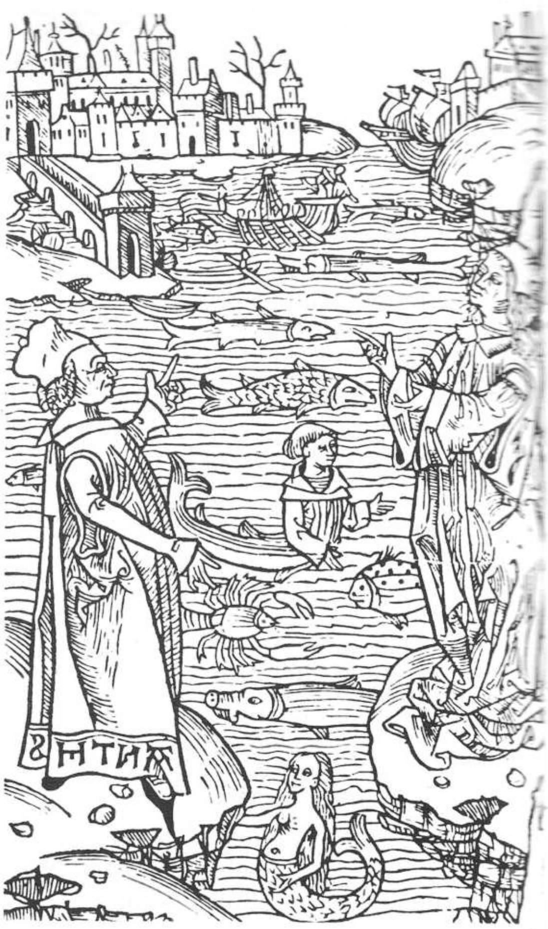
Loch Ness's connection with the sea, by the hole "through which all things pass", is therefore a relationship with the sea of demons. It is a matter of an Other World, rather than of an actual ocean. A metaphor of Etienne de Bourbon – "Fishermen are like sea-monsters who, even though they have the body of a fish, have the head of different animals" [**11**] – permits us to understand the deer- and dragon-headed fish at Metz, and the different water-horses of the *Hortus Sanitatis* [**12**], as demons haunting this great circular sea.

There are two alternative conceptions about these watery passages through the earth: one connects extremely deep lakes to an infernal sea, and the other situates hell under the waters of these lakes themselves, as at Mummelsee. [**13**] In the last century, the shepherds of Grisons (Switzerland) avoided the Luschersee, "whose waters led to the centre of the earth, where burned the eternal sea of flames", for fear of the monster, *Butatsch-Cun-Ilgs*, a "cow's-stomach" covered with eyes and spitting fire. [**14**] In France, the Lac du Bouchet, a crater lake considered to be unfathomable, was once visited by a villager who wanted to measure its depth. For his plumb line he sent down a kettle at the end of a very long cord; when he brought up the utensil again, the kettle "was red-hot, like live embers, because it had been heated by the eternal fire which burns at the bottom of this damned place". [**15**]

In England, locating hell at the bottom of the unfathomable waters was justified by their *turbulence*: three wells at Oxen-le-Hall, near Durham, enjoyed the reputation of being bottomless and their waters "boil"; ducks thrown in are thought to discover a subterranean communication with the River Tees. In 1577, Harrison noted that villagers called these wells the "*Kettles of Hell*" and claimed to have heard the cries of the damned being boiled. [**16**] Some of these abysses, such as the "*Wells of the Black Dog*" in Devonshire, were places of banishment for dangerous spirits. [**17**]

The holes which lead to hell are represented by the best known aquatic path said to lead there; *Lake Averne* (Italy), well known to travellers in the Middle Ages. [**18**] The lake of Laach (Eifel, Germany), a monster lake, is said to be connected to the Atlantic Ocean and to Lake Uelman. *No bird could fly over its waters* [**19**] just as, according to Strabon: "Every bird which flies over Lake Averne falls in the water, killed by the vapours which are emitted from it". [**20**] In the Eifel Lake this noxiousness is also attributed to the emanations of carbonic acid on the north-east shore of the lake. [**21**]

The tradition according to which fish cannot live in Lake Pavin [**22**] is linked to an identical legend concerning the Mum-



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8 ■ W.E. Peuckert 1968, vol.2.

9 ■ *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Mythologie*, 1852, vol.1.

10 ■ O. Rahn 1964.

SULPHUROUS TURBULENCE LEAD TO EUROPEAN ATTRIB. OF TANIWHA LEGENDS IN WAIKATO — 1900'S & 2000

11 ■ Cited by A. Cazenave, 'Monstres et merveilles,' in *Ethnologie Française*, vol 9, 1979.

12 ■ J. Baltrusaitis 1967.

13 ■ Hühnerkopf, 'Mummelsee', in H. Bächtold-Staubli 1929–1936.

14 ■ D. Jecklin 1916.
Note the illustration opposite; and see also discussion of the "Hide" of Chile in Appendix 6.

15 ■ P. Sébillot 1968 B, vol.2.

16 ■ R.C. Hope 1893.

17 ■ *ibidem*.

18 ■ A. de la Sale 1935, vol.1: and C. Kappler 1980.

19 ■ Ph. Wirtgen 1866, vol.1.

20 ■ R.F. Paget 1967.

21 ■ Ph. Wirtgen 1866, vol.1.

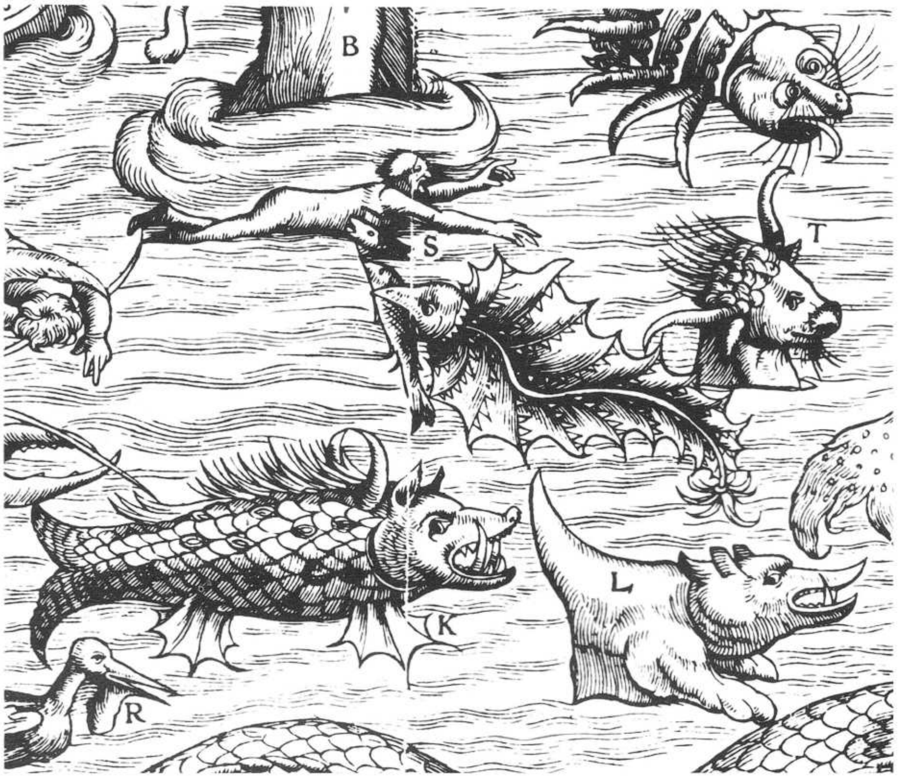
Opposite: **Portion of an illustration in the** *Hortus sanitatis* **(c.1500), attributed to John of Cuba (Johann von Kaub), showing the variety of marine life to be found in a Norwegian fjord. Of particular interest are the mermaid, monk-fish and pig-snouted fish.**

melsee, where, "when one throws fish into the water, it rejects them as the sea does its cadavers". [23] In these crater lakes, there may be a sudden flowing of boiling water, like that which killed all the fish in Lake Lucrino, next to Averne, several years ago. [24] Or perhaps we should attribute the disappearance of fish to the enormous appetite of the monster of Mummelsee. Ponik is said to be responsible for the numerous unsuccessful seedings of trout and salmon in Pohénégamook. [25] The serpent of Lake Bollarnvatn, in Sweden, was said *to destroy fish*. [26] According to legends, when storms threatened, a *turbulence* would come from the depths of these lakes; Lake Frickenhausen, in Bavaria, also shares this reputation. [27]

In the Mummelsee, "one minute after you throw in a stone, an explosion takes place; where the object sinks, the water jumps a foot high, and *foams* as if it were boiling". [28] This phenomenon, certainly attributable to the sulphurous springs in the water, inspired hellish connotations comparable to those of the lake monsters. Sergeant Donald Nicholson, describing what he observed at Loch Ness on 13 April 1976, said the waters were troubled "*like a pot of boiling water*". [29] In Protestant Scotland this evokes the book of *Job*: "Leviathan will make the bottom of the sea boil like a pot". The arrival of Ponik, and of Norwegian lake serpents, is signalled by "great foamings of water". [30]

TANIWHA

The lake serpent which produced conditions similar to those preceding a storm was considered to be the demonic creator of lake tempests. According to Athanasius Kircher: "A margrave of Baden, having thrown some blessed objects into the Mummelsee, suddenly saw a horrible monster from the water's depths, and for seven days an unbearable storm raged". [31] The throwing of holy objects into the waters had the object of exorcising the demon of the storms. A 10th century fresco by Oberzell shows Jesus exorcising the unleashed waters of the lake of Genesareth, represented by the artist as the lake of Constance (Bodensee), where a cloister was established. The winds are personified as the heads of horned demons. [32]



A detail from an illustration of sea-monsters in Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia..* **(1544) showing various composite monsters with bovine or porcine heads. These images were copied enthusiasticly and extensively from the first edition (1539) of Olaus Magnus'** *Carta marina.* **Gesner, Paré and others also transmitted them throughout the sphere of European influence.**

The strange 'sea-dragon' with eyes on its body appears on Olaus' map with the date "1537", which shows that was collecting data up to the last minute. Münster, however, has made the mane more hairy and added the crescent horns. For another version, see the portion of Ortelius' map of Iceland on p121.

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22 ■ A. Lauras-Pourrat 1973.

23 ■ A. Kircher 1664–1665.

24 ■ R.F. Paget 1967.

25 ■ *Echo de la Rivière-du-Loup*, Québec, 1979.

26 ■ B. Thorpe 1851–1852, vol 2.

27 ■ J-N. Sepp 1876.

28 ■ Roder 1791.

29 ■ W.S. Ellis, 'Loch Ness: the lake and the legend,' in *National Geographic Magazine*, vol 151, N°6, 1977.

30 ■ Elisabeth Skjelsvik, 'Norwegian lake and sea monsters,' in *Norveg Folkelivsgransking*, Oslo, vol 7 (1960).

31 ■ A. Kircher 1664–1665.

32 ■ L. Réau 1957, vol 2.

2.6

THE BEAST OF THE LAST DAYS

After unleashing the waters, the lake serpent will finish by destroying the surrounding countryside. This is the cosmogonic theme of most of the stories which place the habitation of a monster under alpine waters. The "frightening depths" of Seealpsee at Oberstdorf (Allgäu) are said to shelter a sleeping dragon. When the time comes, it will devour the inner wall which separates the lake from the valley and Oberstdorf will be engulfed. [**1**] Often a lake known for apparitions of an alleged monster is the object of a tradition which sees in this monster the beast which will annihilate the earth during the Last Days. *"Skrimsl"*, the localised monster of Lagarfljót, in Iceland, showed its humps in 1345 and again in 1749–50. [**2**] The shore-dwellers believed that in the lake there lived a giant serpent, which the sainted Bishop Gudmund had bound head and tail with magic formulas "until the day of the Last Judgement, at which time it would be liberated and would devastate the entire region of Fljötsdal". [**3**] Is there a connection between this legend and the sighting of the monster? A study of Iceland's difficult political–economic situation in 1749 proves to be fruitful in this regard.

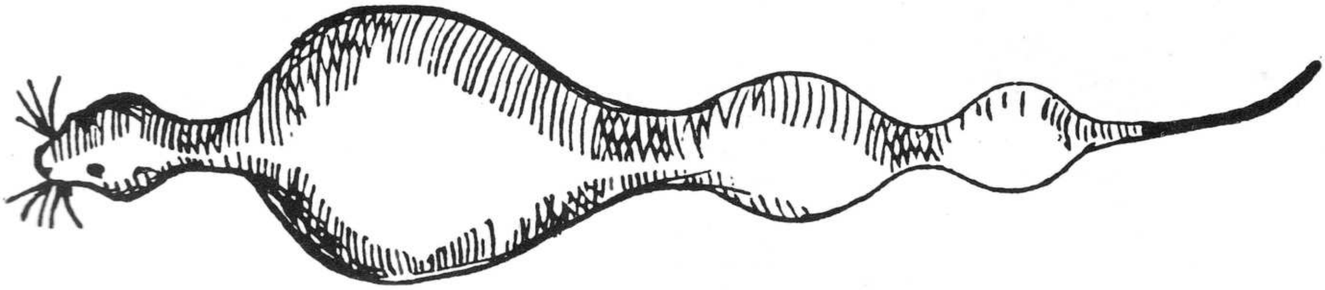
In the waters of Loch-Bél-Dracon (the lake of the dragon's mouth), Irish prophecy locates a *"fiery salmon-serpent, identified as the dragon of the apocalypse"*, which would emerge on St. John's Day at the end of the world to afflict Ireland and avenge St. John the Baptist. [**4**] At the bottom of numerous lakes in Ireland, complementary legends place enormous serpents, with "incredibly long names, the *Piasts*, which St. Patrick holds enchanted until Judgement Day". [**5**] F.W. Holiday claimed that these *piasts* are still seen frequently by the local population. [**6**]

The motif of the *awakening of the serpent* has its origin in the Germanic myth of the "great Midgard serpent", or the sea-serpent who emerges from his lair to engulf the gods at the end of time. [**7**] The legends have indeed maintained this aspect of the temporal rupture which pre-figures the unleashing of the serpent. The beast of Walchensee is said to coil itself around a mountain and to *put its tail into its mouth*; if it loosens its grip and releases its tail the lake will overflow and flood Bavaria. [**8**]

The serpent that eats its own tail is the Ouroboros, a

Opposite: **In fantasy literature as in modern 'horror' films, the eruption of monsters from their secret places portends an end to the familiar order. This turn-of-the-century illustration, by Warwicke Goble, was for a story in** *Pearson's Magazine* **(1900), in which the end of the world comes as the seas freeze, dislodging the monsters hidden for so long in their depths.** [Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library.]

THE FINAL MONSTER



The *Skrimsl* **of Iceland. From S. Baring-Gould,** *Iceland: its scenes and saga* **(1863).** [Fortean Picture Library.]

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[1] K. Reiser 1894, vol.1.

[2] S. Baring-Gould 1863.

[3] A. Olrik 1922.

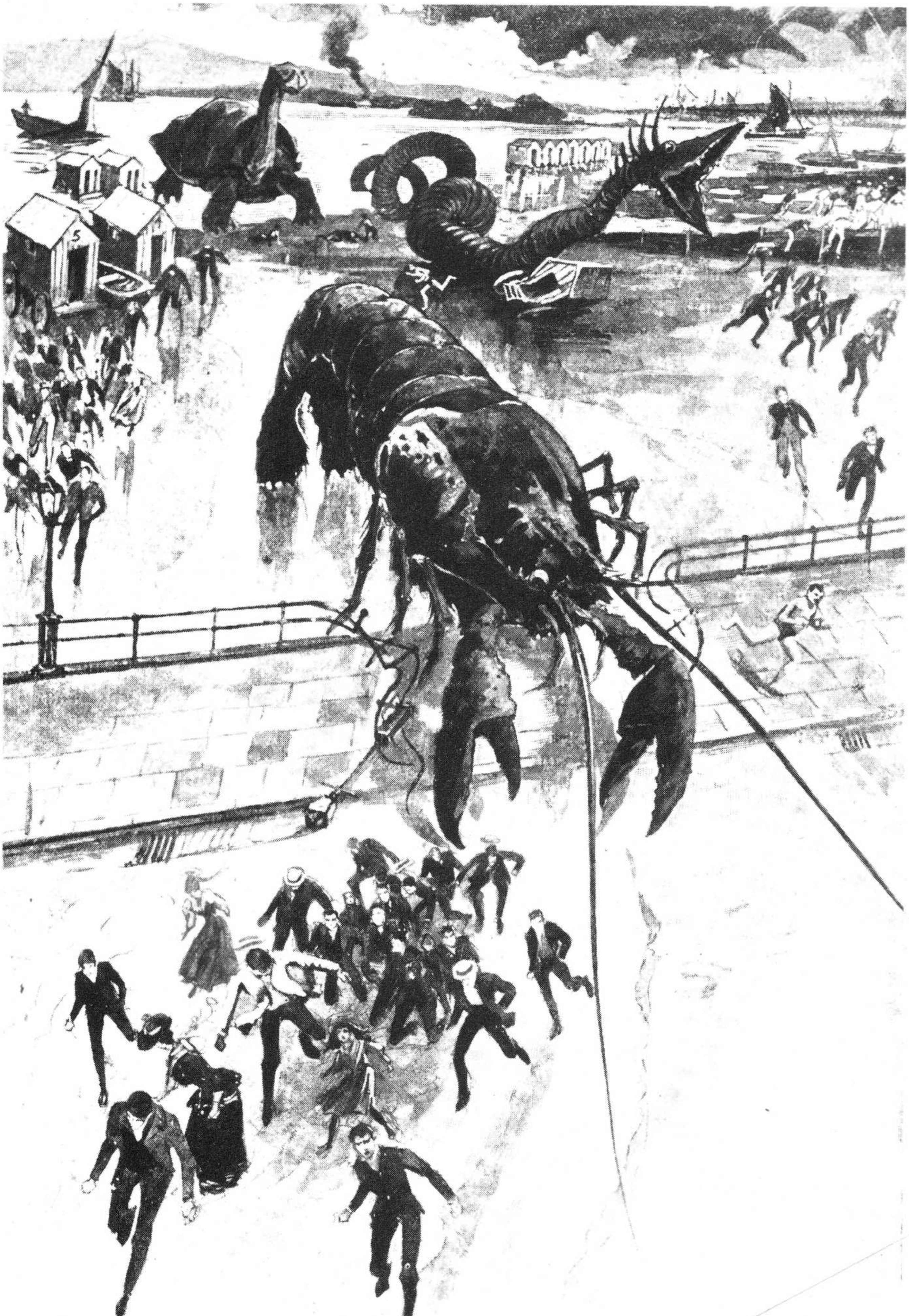
[4] R.C. MacLagan, 'Ghost lights of the West Highlands,' in *Folklore*, vol 8, 1897. This unusual placename is cited from original records; MacLagan adds that the location and modern name of this lough are unknown to him.

[5] P.W. Joyce 1903, vol 2.

[6] F.W. Holiday 1968.

[7] F. Panzer 1848–1855, vol 2. See also the illustration on p262.

[8] *ibidem*. See also, discussion of encircled serpent in Chapter 5, p260f.



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symbol of eternity. [9] Its liberation is the dislocation of the continuum, the emergence of chaos. There seems little doubt that the shore-dwellers of lakes where these legends abound have associated the sightings of alleged anomalous creatures with their economic and political parallels, famines, times of upheaval and disorder; appearing to them to be the certain sign of the final emergence of the monster which will destroy all. [10]

2.7

CAN LEVIATHAN BE CAUGHT WITH A FISH-HOOK?

> *"Aglala, it's worse than ever. Let's get away. God's wounds! It's Leviathan, described by the noble prophet Moses in the life of Job, the holy man. He will swallow everything, men and boats, like pills."*
>
> Rabelais (*The Fourth Book*).

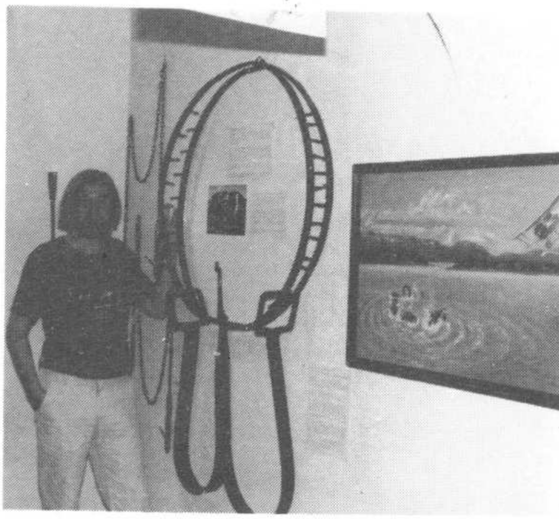
Noé Ducharme's attempt to fish for Ponik is fully a part of the "mythic landscape". It is clear that such an attempt at capture has in fact taken place at Pohénégamook and in several other monster lakes, including Mr. Roy's plan for a monster trap. Ducharme's "big grips" [1] were made by a blacksmith, like those used in 1894 by the society for the capture of the monster at the Swedish Lake Storsjön, plans of which are still kept at the Museum of Jämtland at Östersund. [2] "Bait of meat and of cheese", of a pig and of a half-cow were to be used in Scandinavia.

In his journal, Sir Walter Scott inscribed these notes on 23 November 1827: "Clanranald told us, as an example of the credulity of the Highlanders, that a group of his compatriots, among others Borradale, believing that the famous water-cow lived in the little lake next to his house, resolved to draw the monster from his lair. With this idea in mind, he bivouacked on the banks, having placed in the waters a nocturnal bait, two small sea anchors, each one baited with the corpse of a dog, killed for this purpose. The water-cow would throw itself on the bait, and they would wait to hoist it onto the beach in the morning; but they discovered, with consternation, that the hook had not even been touched." [3]

Nonetheless, all these *unsuccessful* attempts serve to link diverse pieces of mythic landscape. In Scandinavia the monster hunts are modelled on a Germanic mythological scenario, "Thor fishing", collected with other traditions in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, the Icelandic poet. The god Thor, "protector of men", having decided to rid man of the Midgard Serpent, "put the head of a bull on a hook" [4] which he threw into the waves. The serpent nibbled hungrily at the bait, but his somersaults were so fierce that Thor's companion, the giant Hymir, cut the line in terror and the beast fell back into the depths [see illustrations opposite and on p146].

Opposite: **Thor's battle with the Midgard serpent. A painting by Henry Fuseli (1790).** [© Royal Academy of Arts, London.]

Although born in Switzerland, Fuseli lived and worked in England; this scene was inspired by reading an account in Mallet's *Northern antiquities* **(1770). Compare the ears with those of the** *Storsjöodjur* **on p34.**



The author with the huge spring-trap (153cm by 92cm), made to catch the monster of Lake Storsjön, in mid-Sweden. The device was ordered by a local company, founded in 1894 to hunt the beast. The trap, baited with piglets, was set near the bridge to Frosö, the island in the lake on which stands the runic stone illustrated on p17.

The company hired a Norwegian whaler, an expert harpooner, to watch the trap. For all that, the 'Leviathan' of the Storsjön never came to the dinner party, and all that remains today are the great catching tools, displayed in Jämtlands' Läns museum at Östersund.

[© Anne-Marie Meurger]

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9 ■ F. Huxley 1979.

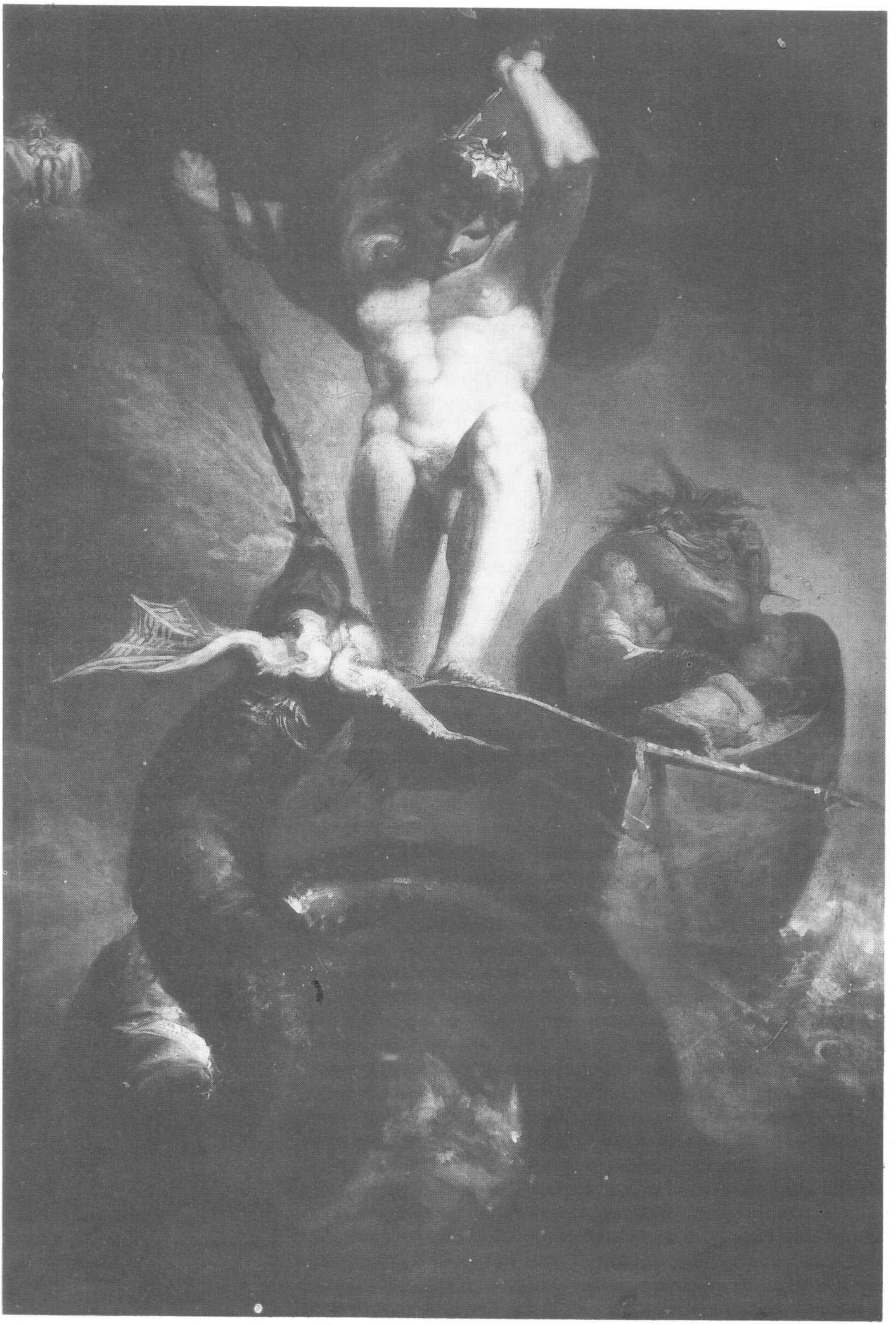
10 ■ See also the illustrations on pages 237, 261 and 262.

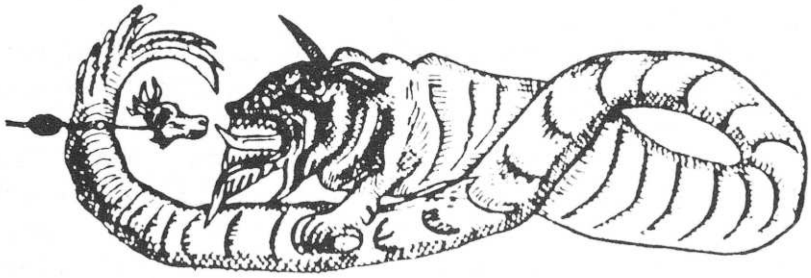
1 ■ *"becs d'ancre"*

2 ■ Elisabeth Skjelsvik, 'Norwegian lake and sea monsters,' in *Norveg Folkelivsgransking*, Oslo, vol 7 (1960).

3 ■ Sir Walter Scott 1890, vol 2.

4 ■ F. Genzmer-Thule 1932, vol 2.





Thor's line, baited with an ox's head tempts the Midgard Serpent; from an Icelandic manuscript, circa 1680. [Fortean Picture Library]

Well before Snorri Sturluson compiled a literary translation of this myth, it figured in several works of art spread throughout Sweden and Denmark [5] , crossing the entire orbit of the Viking conquest from Iceland to Northern England, where it appeared on the cross of Gosforth, which dates from the 9th century. [6] A stone capital dating from about 1050, in the church of Bocherville in Normandy, has even depicted the revenge of the serpent, the last combat with Thor, during the "twilight of the Gods". [7]

This divine fishing expedition which failed, was interpreted by the Church according to the passage from the book of *Job*: "And Leviathan, do you fish for him with a hook, or with a line, or do you restrain his tongue?" Only Jesus Christ, the "mystical fisherman", can risk drawing the water-monster from his abyss.

SHEEP AS TRADITIONAL BAIT FOR MONSTER RECAPITULATED IN 'TANIWHA HUNTS' AT OTAKI, WAIRARAPA, WAIKATO

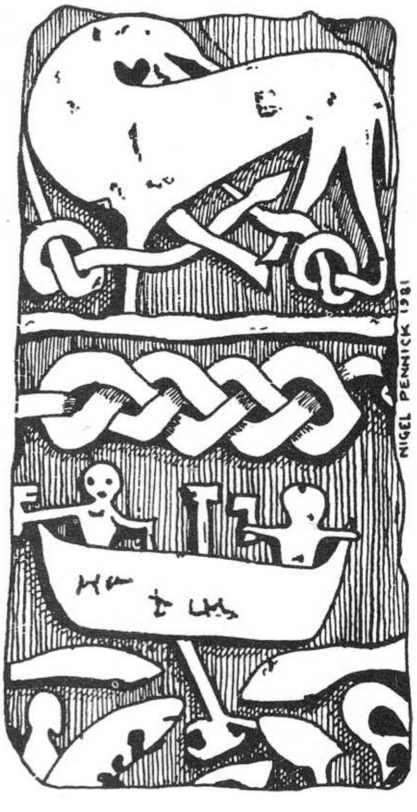
European chronicles, however, report other attempts to fish for the dragon. According to an historian of the 16th century, the knight of Trautenberg, having discovered the lair of the dragon in a crevice, let down "to the unquiet depths, a solid cord hung with a pointed hook, to which he had baited a sheep". The beast ate the morsel and died from it, and the knight suspended its stuffed skin in the old tower of the family chateau. [8]

Exceptional success! Ordinarily such captures fail, the monster being considered, as we have already seen, to be in symbiosis with his milieu, which defends him. An Estonian tradition depicts, with sinister detail, the "Black Lake" in the region of Viitna, of which the bottom, like that of Pohénégamook, was covered with a carpet of sunken tree trunks. [9] Its waters contained no fish. Intrigued by this anomaly, fishermen dragged the lake with a net one day and, with stupefaction, found entangled in it a sort of yellow fish covered with hair. The water of the lake started to billow; the fishermen decided to carry their catch to the village. The lake rose up, its waves threatening to engulf them *if they didn't release its lord and master*. The men didn't have to be told twice, and when the beast was returned, the waters subsided. Since then, no one has seen it again. *All of the lake seedings have come to nothing, and the fish which are put there disappear.* It is believed that the "Ancient One" (the monster) must eat them. [10]

Difficulties of acclimitisation in NZ (trout, water fowl) + vilification of monsters or eels

You would think that you were listening to the citizens of Saint-Éleuthère, questioned about the unfruitful seedings of their lake, or Mr. Roy at Lake Saint-François describing the extinction of the fish there. The monster is taboo; any attempt to kill it or to hamper it can have dire consequences. As Elzéar

A relief on the Gosforth Cross, Cumberland, showing Thor, on the left in the boat, fishing for the Midgard serpent. His left hand holds the line baited with the ox's head. [Drawn by Nigel Pennick ©]



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5 ■ A. Olrik 1922.
See also: Brondsted, 'Thors fiskeri,' in *Fra Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark* 1955.

6 ■ A. Olrik 1922.

7 ■ *ibidem.*

8 ■ R. Kühnau 1910–1913.

9 ■ *Courrier de la Rivière-du-Loup*, Québec, 1980.

10 ■ O. Loorits 1951, vol 2.

11 ■ G. Langelaan 1967.

12 ■ E.D. Baumann 1972.

Sirois explained: "Noé Ducharme tried to shoot Ponik, and regretted it".

This motif is particularly widespread in Scotland, especially in the north, where the Vikings settled. Stories, presented as actual events, describe men who went fishing for serpents and who never returned from their expeditions. One of these narrations focuses on Loch Watten at the extreme north of the British Isles, near John O'Groats. There, in 1923, a certain Colonel Trimble is said to have seen "an animal with a long back, of six metres, and a small head at the end of a long neck", which held his gaze. The soldier became red with anger when his dog was devoured by the monster, and he vowed revenge. He installed a bait "of large pieces of horse meat on enormous hooks suspended on floaters". Then the Colonel himself mounted the look-out. His housekeeper, who heard him cry out, ran up and found him dead in the reeds, pierced by his own hook. [**11**]

At Loch Ness itself they tell a variant of the story. Here it is a farmer who, wanting to follow the example of the god Thor, had a local blacksmith make an enormous hook. The bait was a sheep's corpse. Oh, vain efforts! Nessie never came to take this succulent morsel. Too furious to return empty-handed after weeks of fruitless efforts, the man decided to watch his bait by night. His empty boat was found in the morning, floating in front of Urquhart Castle. [**12**]

THE MONSTER HUNT WITH HOOKED BAIT FAILS BECAUSE THE MONSTER IS "IN SYMBIOSIS WITH HIS MILIEU, WHICH DEFENDS HIM"

SOMETIMES A HUMOROUS TWIST ENDING SERVES THIS POINT - CHARLIE DOUGLAS' ACCOUNT OF THE ITALIANS SCARED BY THE ROTTEN LOG THEY HOOKED IN PLACE OF THE MONSTER EEL.

2.8

THE OUTLINE OF A MYTH

At Loch Ness, Pohénégamook, and at a hundred other lakes, a cycle of archaic popular beliefs is justified by recent real events. In 1975, a search was undertaken for bodies of drowned youngsters at Lake Pohénégamook, and perhaps some of the divers had unfortunate encounters in these black waters. We have been told of a similar episode in Lake Carheil, near Fermont (Saguenay). The Scottish have furnished numerous examples, as have the Germans and the Austrians.

We cannot but realise that, in this case, *the reality only proves the myth*, or rather, *with time the event becomes myth itself.* The lengthening of the years removes the particulars from the truth – eg. the names of the divers and other details – in order to raise it to the level of a *fixed model*, an intangible "terrified diver". We can repeat this analysis for each of the other themes examined.

There is a *complete coincidence* between the mythical details ascribed to Pohénégamook and those attributed to European waters; the lake without a bottom, inhabited by a monster; the waters which do not render up their drowned; the frightened divers. All of this is found in dozens of examples in France, Switzerland, Germany and Scotland. In many cases, the real characteristics have also found an analogous biotope. The severe coldness of the water of Champlain and Pohénégamook was also one of the distinctive marks of the monster lake of

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[11] ■ G. Langelaan 1967.

[12] ■ E.D. Baumann 1972.

Frickenhausen in Bavaria. [1]

But *facts* have also been integrated in the web of the fable. We see here, bit by bit, the superimposition of the mythic landscape upon the real landscape of Pohénégamook; an unfathomable lake, where, in an unspecified cavern, an archaic beast draws in the bodies of drowned people. *This fabulous landscape has been able to co-exist with the real landscape until 1980*, when Mel Corey, of Portland, first dived and destroyed the rumour of the unfathomability of Pohénégamook. People who had spoken of the lake as being 600 feet (180m) deep were proved wrong, as it was shown to be only 100 feet (30m), even in the middle of the lake. [2]

Until then, the lake had accommodated various attempts at soundings, which had only reinforced the myth. Amateurs are said to have tried to reach the bottom of the lake without success, and the fathoming by an army helicopter, which sought the bodies in 1975, knew the same lack of success. [3] Similarly at Loch Ness: when the soundings done by the workers constructing the Caledonian Canal could not find the bottom, the shore-dwellers considered this fact to be a justification of their beliefs. [4]

As for the communication supposed to exist between Pohénégamook and Lake Témiscouata, Mel Corey, even though unable to discover either the entrance of the passage or the cavern and the interior sea said to extend between the two lakes, was said by the newspapers to be sufficiently convinced of the existence of such a conduit because of the presence of a strong underwater current. [5] This is not at all impossible. At the end of the glacial period, 12,500 years ago, Lakes Témiscouata, Touladi, and Squatec together formed a *great inland sea*. [6]

Could there exist a veritable underground kingdom bathed by this prehistoric ocean? Such an idea smacks of Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. Modern conjecture is the ally of archaic myth. But the a myth need not be true as a precondition of its ability to express itself. The slightest hint of possibility will support it.

It is possible that the cavern of Pohénégamook doesn't exist. The existence of one at Loch Ness seems quite as improbable. [7] However, as with the property of unfathomability, shore-dwellers do not require any factual *evidence* for the idea of this passage in order to have it completely engraved on their minds. At Saint-Éleuthère, as in Scotland, keeping pace with its monster, the landscape plays hide-and-seek also.

2.9

VOYAGE TO THE LAND OF DRAGONS

Lake monsters remained quite discrete during the Middle Ages. The Age of Faith associated winged dragons and their aquatic brothers, once and for all, with paganism. Hieronymus Bosch's triptych, *The temptation of St. Anthony*, painted around 1500, provides an excellent

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1 ■ J-N. Sepp 1876.

2 ■ *Écho de la Rivière-du-Loup*, Québec, 1980.

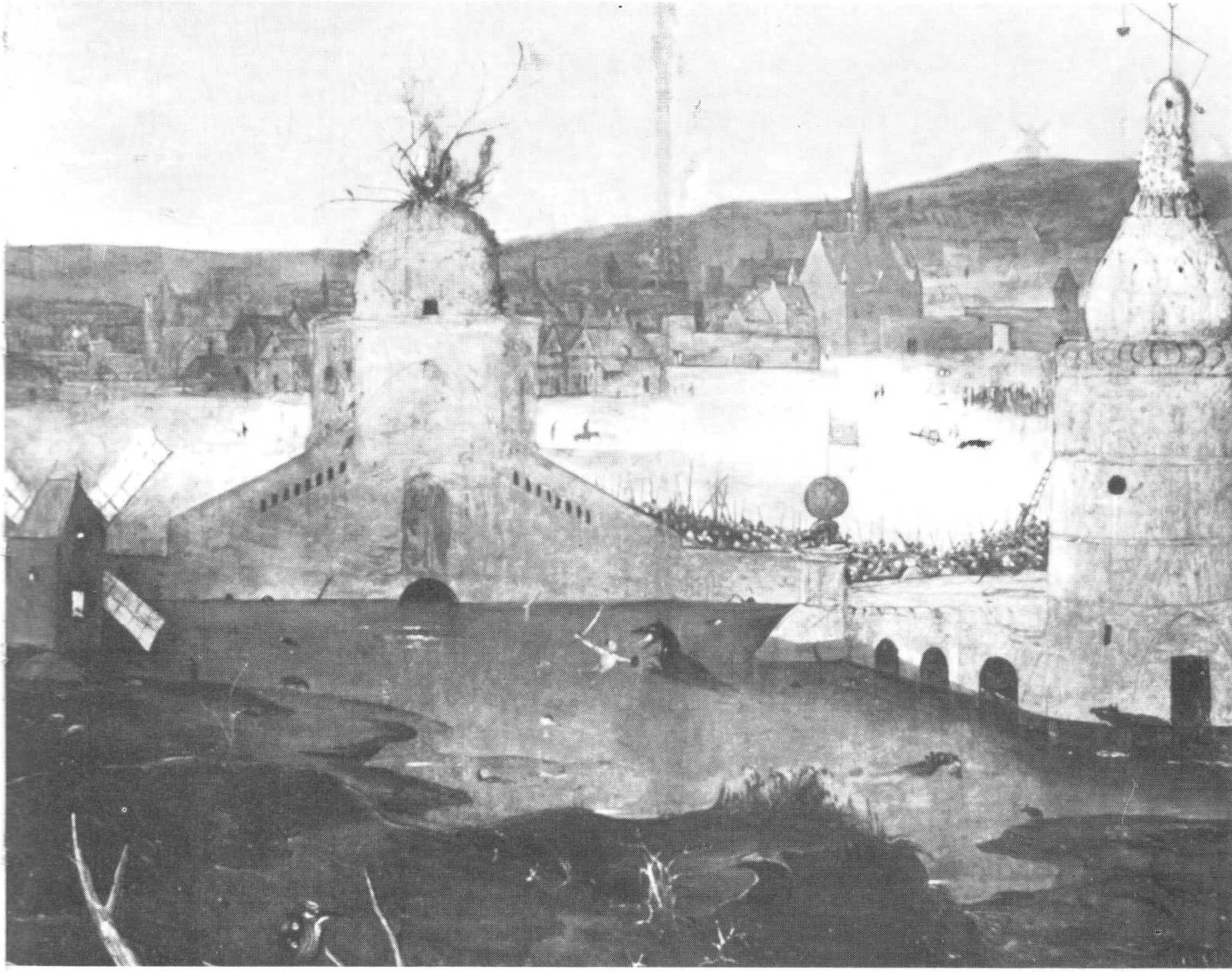
3 ■ *ibidem*.

4 ■ O.F. Swire 1963.

5 ■ *Écho de la Rivière-du-Loup*, Québec, 1980.

6 ■ P.L. Martin 1977.

7 ■ R.P. Mackal 1976.



Detail of the right-hand panel of *The temptation of St Anthony* **(c.1500) by Hieronymus Bosch, showing the water monsters.** [© Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon.]

demonstration of this: under the towers and cupolas of an imaginary Eastern city, a crowd bristling with pikes contemplates, fascinated, a duel between a naked gladiator, immersed in a stream, and an enormous dark dragon. The mud is scattered with human debris. A water-cow is stretched out, swimming, a human head in its mouth. [1]

This world of human sacrifice to cruel aquatic gods is inspired by the fabulous reports of the explorers of new lands, whose gods were demonised in the tradition of the Christian martyrs who were thrown to the beasts. It is not until the Renaissance that a historical and naturalistic concern overtakes these superstitious constructions. The first sighting of a lake monster, presented as a factual report, comes from Switzerland. This is not mere chance. The Swiss cantons were at once the door to the New (the preaching of John Calvin at Geneva) and the bastion of the Old (the counter- reformation had its capital in Lucerne). It was a time of change, fertile with investigation, with doubt, and with cultural transmissions, as embodied in the work of Conrad Gesner. [2]

1468 :
SHIFT TO THE
STYLE OF
"FACTUAL REPORT"

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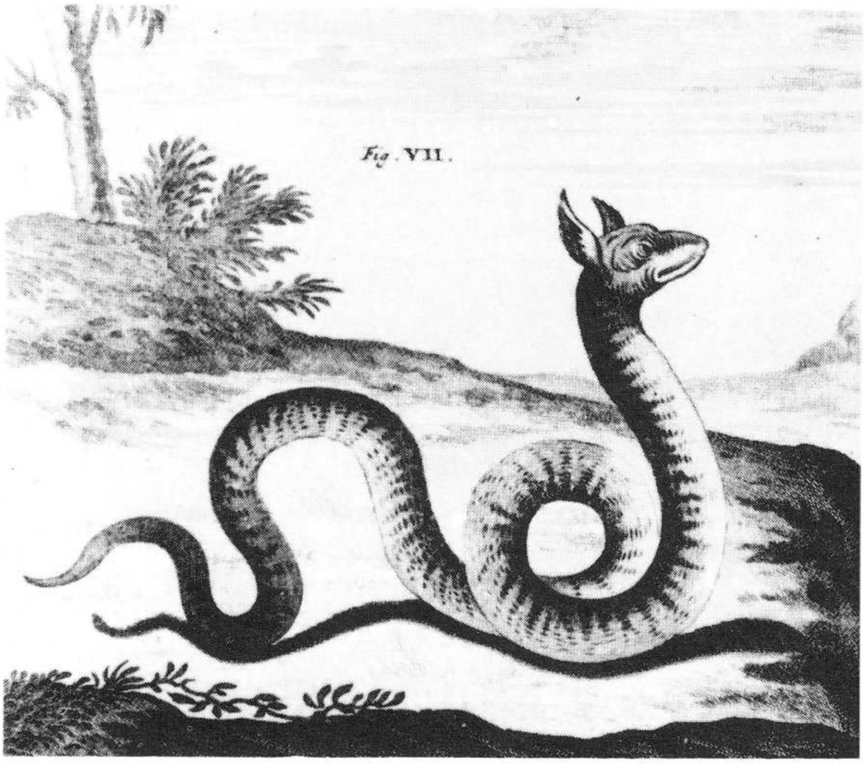
1 ■ W. Fraenger 1975.

2 ■ See also: Introduction p15ff.
Gesner pioneered many cryptozoological exploits, and was called "the German Pliny" by the paleontologist Baron Georges Cuvier.



The "great and horrible dragon" which migrated from the lake of Lucerne to the River Reuss, in 1468. From J.J. Scheuchzer, *Itinera per Helvetiae...* **(1723).** [Fortean Picture Library]

According to the Etterlin chronicles and Diebold Schilling, several people at Lucerne in 1468 saw "a great and horrible dragon-worm emerge from the lake and swim into the swelling Reuss, passing under the bridge. Nobody was able to determine its length or size, or the speed at which it was travelling". [**3**] This ancestor of mountain lake-serpents has been honoured by a compilation of information; an engraving has even immortalised it. It is probable that, following the rise of the river, preventive measures should have been taken to avoid a new catastrophe in this city. According to the *Schweizer chronicle* (1502–1509) a "step" was placed under the bridge over the River Reuss [**4**] , and on the map of Lucerne by geographer Martin-Martin, dated 1597, enormous wood piles are shown.

It was thought that there would be no further problems with monsters at Lucerne. But dragons are not easily beaten. They found a faithful interpreter in the person of the town's municipal writer, Renward Cysat. [**5**] Politician, theoretician of the counter-reformation, a man of many talents such as only humanism can produce, Cysat gathered all that he could find about the city and its surroundings. Above Lucerne is Mount Pilate, with a lake at its summit. Its banks were prohibited to the curious and to hunters by a municipal ordinance of 1387, which renewed this already ancient taboo. At the bottom of this lake an evil spirit – who in his past life was nothing less than the Pro-Consul Pontius Pilate – was said to be sleeping a restless slumber from which no one was supposed to disturb him. This Pilate seems to be a Christianisation of a water-demon. [**6**]

Magicians and imprudent people who threw money into the water, unleashed his anger, causing a storm on the lake. The rage of Pilate was manifested by the Kriembach, a violent little stream coming down the mountain, which had inundated the outskirts many times. The chronicler Diebold Schilling was convinced that the disastrous rise of the Kriembach in 1475 was

A detail from Martin-Martin's 1597 plan of Lucerne, showing the bridge over the River Reuss under which the lake-dragon was rumoured to have passed in 1486. [Fortean Picture Library]

3 ■ A. Lutolf 1862.

4 ■ T. Von Liebenau 1881.

5 ■ B. Hidber, 'Renward Cysat,' in *Archiv für schweizerische Geschichte*, 1862, vol 13.

6 ■ H. Dübi, 'Von drachen und stollenwürmern,' in *Archives Suisses des traditions populaires*, 1939–1940, vol 37.

due to the schemings of some trouble-makers who disturbed the spirit of the abyss. [7] A more archaic tradition situates the dragon at the bottom of Lake Pilate, and in the water of the Kriembach. [8] In the Swiss tradition, *when there was a flood, people said: "the dragon has taken flight"*. [9] Renward Cysat, who had gone to gather plants on the shores of Rigi, heard the elders at Witznau tell stories of black magicians who had mounted dragons, which, by their flight, provoked "disastrous floods", destroying their village. [10] The dragon's movements are held responsible for the rising of the waters. It is, therefore, not surprising that the sighting in the Reuss was repeated: "There was, in the year 1480, a great flooding in this country. People had seen a Great Serpent with four feet emerge from the Aar and wander down the mountain, from Zoffinger to Ryckern". [11]

The Reuss flows into the Aar. This trajectory must have been familiar to the monsters, because another report relates that "In 1566, during a summer following previously unequalled floods, a Great Serpent was seen swimming in the Reuss, near Bremgarten, and, emerging from the river at night, it went onto the alpine slopes, tearing calves to pieces". [12] Bremgarten is situated before the confluence of the Reuss and the Aar. A burgher of the area, Jacob Huber, saw the beast in the river and, "*taking it for a huge salmon*, wanted to harpoon it with his rod; he touched it but without leaving a wound. The annoyed serpent came out of the water and threw itself onto Huber. The terrified man jumped from his boat and ran hastily to his home, where he stayed, and then *died* six weeks later". [13]

The appearance of the water-monster during inundations is a constant factor in Germanic countries. One of the oldest documents in this regard is furnished by the *Chronicle of the Dominicans of Guebwiller* in Alsace. After a flooding in 1304, in the mountainous region of Ballon, "a horrible dragon was swimming in the waves. When the waters receded, the ferocious worm came onto the shore towards Isenheim, and caused great damage to men and to livestock". [14]

In Norway, in 1636, the pastor of Londen, Nicolas Gramius, reported: "In the last flood, a great serpent from the waters came to the sea; he had lived up to that point in the Mjös and Branz rivers. *From the shores of the latter river, he crossed the fields*. People saw him moving like a long ship's mast, overturning all that he met on his path, even trees and huts". [15]

Alsace, 1304; Reuss, 1468–1566; Aar, 1480; Norway, 1636: these narrations accumulated from the 14th to the 17th centuries and present the same scenario: the appearance, on the waves of an unusually serious flood, of a great serpent-shaped amphibian, who comes onto the banks to attack people and livestock.

According to the Norwegian tradition, the serpents are born in these lakes, but as they grow it becomes necessary for them to find larger and larger lakes. When they reach their maximum size, the sea is the only place where they can live comfortably. A migration towards the sea is undertaken by means of the rivers and also *crossing short distances on land.*

THE [illegible] OF EEL LIFE-CYCLES
JUSTIFIED A SIMILAR MYTHOLOGY.

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7 ■ T. Von Liebenau 1881.

8 ■ E.L. Rochholz 1856–1857.

9 ■ See: Mackensen, 'Drache,' in H. Bächtold-Staubli 1929–1936, vol 2.

10 ■ R. Cysat 1969.

11 ■ *ibidem.*

12 ■ *ibidem.*

IN A LATTER-DAY
WAIKATO SAURIAN
REPORT THE TANIWHA
WAS STRANDED IN A
CAVE AFTER FLOODS

13 ■ *ibidem.*

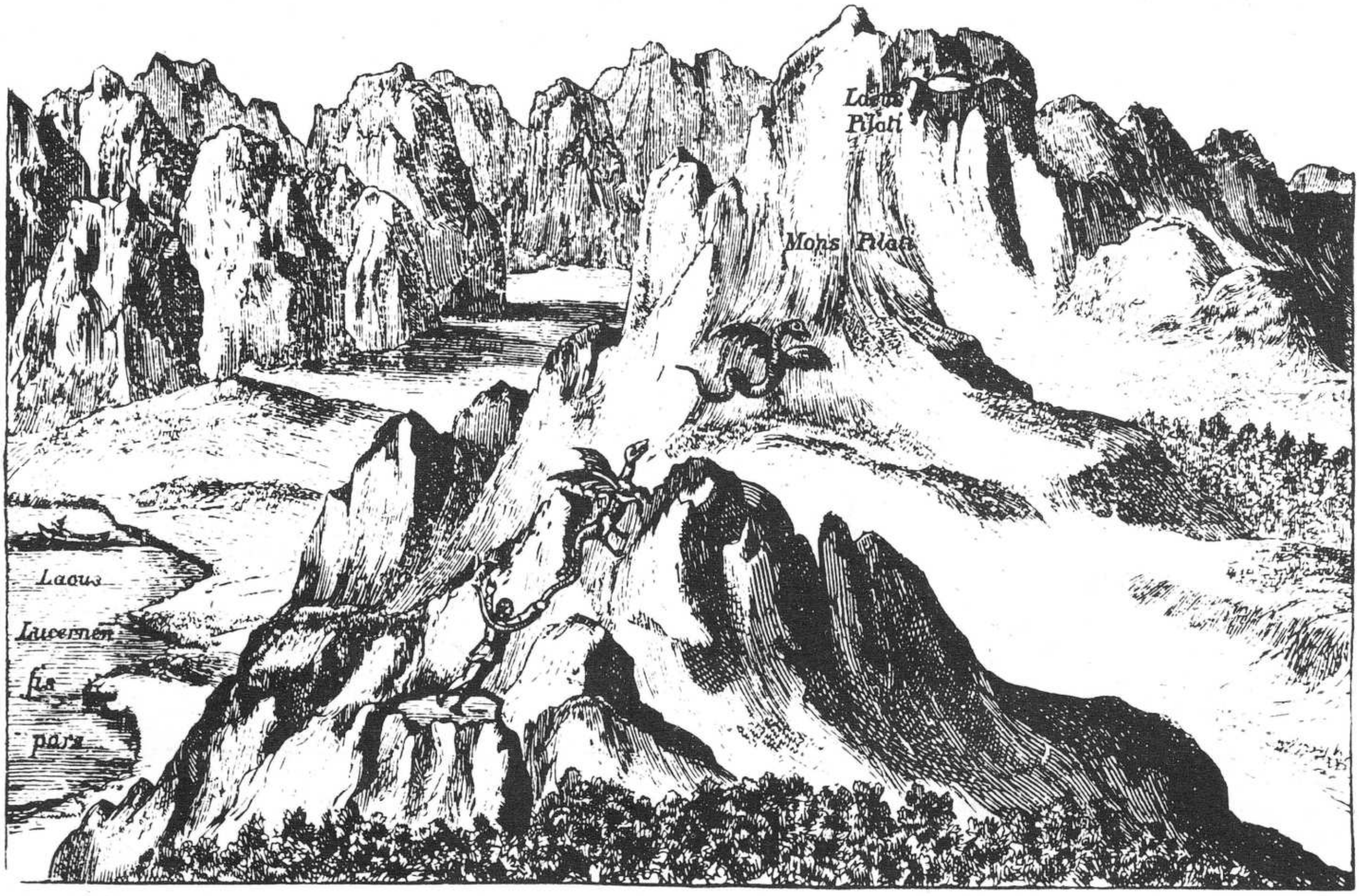
Another death due to an aquatic monster is more mysterious. In 1638, Peter Bartels, a Hamburg sailor, gave chase on the Elbe (Germany) to a monster "resembling a giant deer with pointed horns on its head". Just as the sailor was getting ready to harpoon it, *the animal suddenly disappeared.* This disappearance so terrified him that he was thrown into an epileptic fit and was carried away, speechless, dying shortly afterwards. Some have speculated, however, that *the monster had an electric force in its tail, and transmitted it to the sailor along the metal of the harpoon.* See: O. Berrecke 1886.

This last 'explanation' brings the effects produced by the monster closer to those frequently described in alleged reports of encounters with UFOs or their 'occupants'. See, for example: *Strange Effects from UFOs* (NICAP 1969).

The mysterious force of electricity has taken the place of the supernatural powers of the monster (in its representation of the Devil). In modern UFO stories, the force would be called "magnetism".

14 ■ Moosmann 1844.

15 ■ Happelius, cited in F. Denis 1843.



Kircher's version of Cysat's story of the flight on a dragon (see p14) between the lake of Lucerne and Mt Pilate (*Mundus subterraneus* 1664). [Fortean Picture Library]

Sometimes floating trunks trap them in an area too narrow for passage and they die. [16]

In Switzerland, also, the lakes may be considered as cradles. Let us not forget that the reptile of the Reuss came from the lake of Lucerne. Renward Cysat became impassioned about the inhabitants of the sleeping waters. This is what he said: "In the year 1599 we recognised the existence among us, in the lake of Root, of an extremely large serpent, as is indicated by the traces that he left. He provoked a panic in the area. I myself interrogated sincere witnesses and this is what I found. He has been seen, coiled around a rock in the lake and a similar beast was noticed plunging into the water. Others had followed his tracks almost to the Vogelsang farm several times, his tracks were as wide as those of a wagon in the grass. This imprint had a spiral shape, like that of a serpent crawling, and *it was all slimy*. It headed towards the lake and disappeared there, which leads us to suppose that he threw himself into the lake. This serpent spent some time in a dark grotto on the shores of the lake, where people had discovered the remains of devoured fish". [17]

The detail of a viscous excretion is similar to that noticed among Norwegian serpents and the Scottish water-horse. An English text of the 17th century describes a dragon living in St Leonard's Forest, in West Sussex, as having, on each side of his body, balls of flesh which are like the humps of Ponik and Nessie. In its wake it "left a glutinous and slimie matter which is very corrupt and offensive to the scent..." [18] Thus, people have tried to explain the "silvery" appearance of Nessie's skin in terms of the production of a protective mucus, like that of slugs. [19] This "slime" is related to the venomous character

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16 ■ T.Å. Bringsvaerd 1979. EEL-SERPENT CONNECTION

17 ■ R. Cysat 1969.
On a naturalistic level, this story may refer to a huge *eel*; this animal secretes mucus and its spiralled track corresponds to the sinuous progression of an eel moving on land. But the episode has been reworked to fit the traditional lore of snakes, which are allegedly "slimy" creatures.

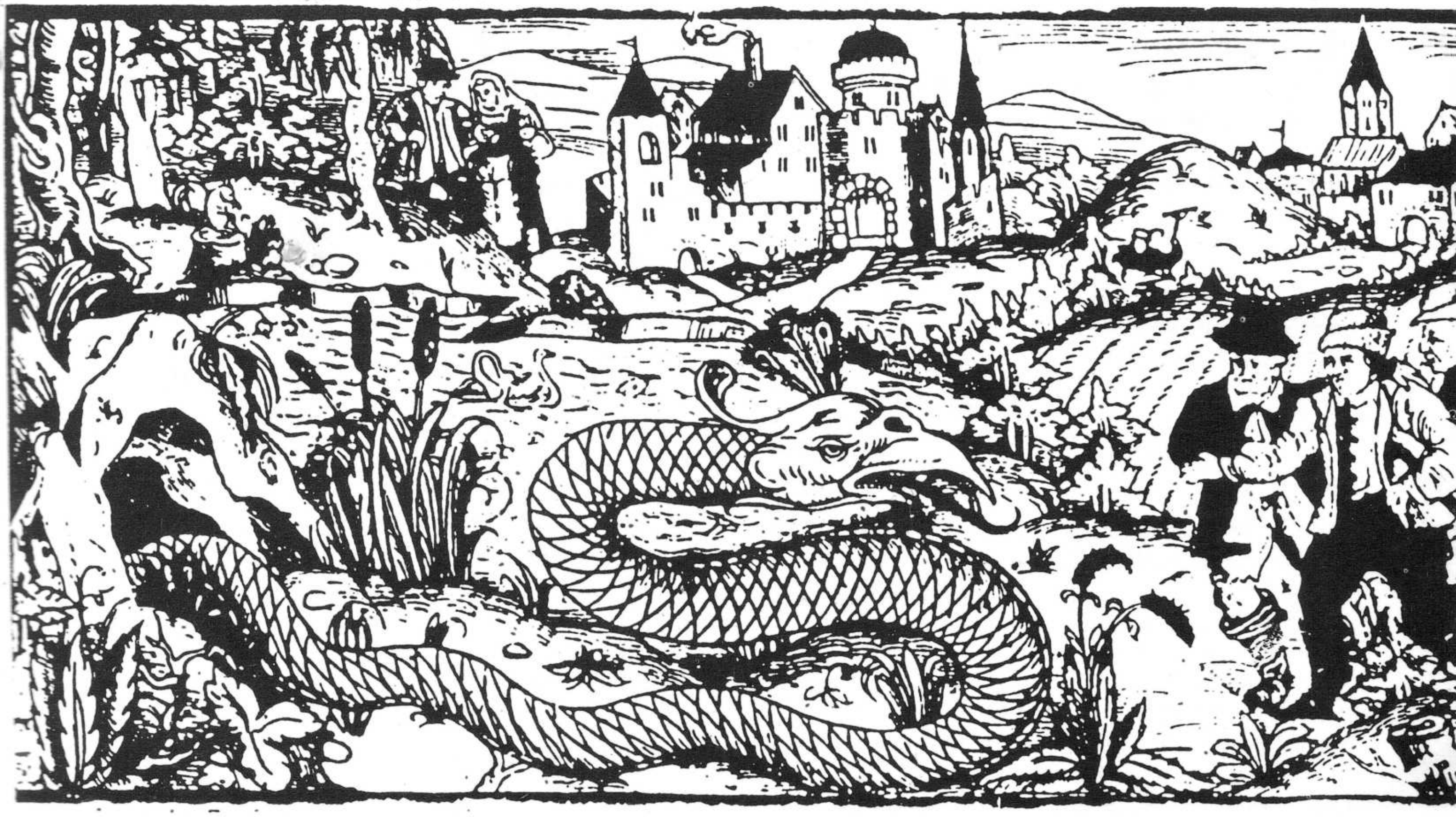
18 ■ John Trundle, *A True and Wonderful Discourse relating a strange and monstrous Serpent (or Dragon) lately discovered, and yet living, to the great Annoyance and divers Slaughters of both Men and Cattell, by his strong and violent Poison: in Sussex, two miles from Horsham, in a Woode called St Leonard's Forrest, and thirtie Miles from London, this present Month of August, 1614. With the true Generation of Serpents*, in Earl of Oxford's Collection: *Harlean Miscellany*, vol 3, 1810 edition, p227–231.
More easily accessible as cited in J. Simpson 1973, p35. p67.

19 ■ F.W. Holiday 1968.

attributed to the animal. According to Cysat, "People believe that seeing the dragons in the air signifies the oncoming of war or of fire; in the waters, it signifies plague or flood". [20] According to primitive beliefs, it is the serpent which brought about flooding and also epidemics: "in the Rhineland, for as long as can be remembered, a dragon bathed in a fountain, and all those who drank there, man or beast, were killed". [21]

A curious French pamphlet of 1632, *A true account of the monstrous and terrifying dragon slain in a mountain of the Upper Auvergne*, speaks of the "dark and shadowy lake always covered by mists" (Lake Pavin, Puy-de-Dome), where "monstrous uncatchable fish" lived. Inhabiting the 'Fairies' Rock', on a bank, a feathered and scaly dragon, with a "peacock's plume" between its two horns, attacked a man called La Brière at midnight. La Brière defended himself valiantly and slew his adversary, "*but not without being affected by the buboes* [bubons] *of the plague around the wounds which the dragon had made; the people of the neighbourhood offered a hundred crowns for a surgeon who would attend him and also to embalm the animal*". [22] Later on, the illness was diagnosed as plague.

DRAGON AS PLAGUE-BEARER: AUBECK AND VALEE FOUND ACCOUNTS OF UFO'S DEPOSITING PLAGUE IN OLD EUROPE. MICHEL IN 'FLYING SAUCER VISION' DRAWS DIRECT EVOLUTIONARY LINK FROM OLDEN DRAGONS TO MODERN UFO'S.



This German woodcut of 1590 (preserved in the library at Augsburg) transforms an unusual but not unnatural event – the discovery of a large grass-snake in a morass near the lake of Constance – into a monstrous one, and shows the necessity to study our historical material closely. During the Renaissance few people could read, so that then, perhaps more than now, sensationalist illustrations and exaggerated reporting could ensure greater sales of popular books.

In this case the artist has instinctively used some telling conventions. A crown of peacock feathers links the snake to the Serpent of the Garden of Eden, and in all probability was intended to impute a devilish origin to an otherwise mundane monster. Nor could the artist resist adding the head of a Cockatrice, a mythological creature born of the union of a snake and a chicken which was believed to be closely related to the dragon.

20 ■ R. Cysat 1969.

21 ■ *ibidem.*

22 ■ *Récit Véritable du Monstrueux et Effroyable Dragon occis en une Montagne du Hault Auvergne* (Anon 1632).

On the association between a crown of peacock plumes and a monstrous serpent, see the illustration below.

Having this principle in mind, we went to look for the serpent of the lake of Root, this time in the work of Renward Cysat's nephew, Leopold. In his *Description of the lake of Lucerne*, Leopold Cysat included a great deal of information on other bodies of water in the area. "It is a commonly held opinion, in and around the city of Lucerne, as at the Rotsee, near the city of Ebikon, which belongs to the lords of Gilg, that when the lord or master of the lake is going to die during the year, an enormous fish of an unknown species appears. Several years ago people thought they saw an enormous fish resembling a wooden beam. When they approached to examine it, they saw the form dissolve and leave, and understood that it was merely a school of breams with a single compact mass. However, during that year no one of the line of Gilg died." [**23**] Leopold Cysat's monster is the parent of the "fish as long as tree trunks" of the other Swiss lakes like the Wallensee, and numerous "logs" of Norway and of North America.

The family of Gilg, to which Leopold Cysat alluded, only became masters of Rotsee in the lifetime of Melchior de Gilg (1574–1616), who was alive at the time that Leopold's book appeared (1611). It is likely that the warning referred, rather, to the previous incumbents at Rotsee, whose family died out in 1591 [**24**], and that it was only reported to the new masters. Such an aquatic serpent, portending catastrophes, was well known in Norway, where, according to the 16th-century writer Jacob Ziegler, a monster with *the head of a horse* was sighted in Lake Mjösa before the expulsion of King Christian II in 1522. [**25**] The beast of Lake Lund "appeared only before the death of a king". [**26**]

Sometimes the creature is simply a fish of a known species, but of enormous size. In Switzerland, Diebold Schilling recorded that on 29 July 1509, in the time of Pope Julius and the Emperor Maximilian, a great fish had surfaced in Lake Zoog, near Axt, "which animal *since ancient times*, when something important like a war, a death, or something costly to life had come about, would show itself. Most people attributed to it a resemblance of a *carp*, but no fish could attain the size of *a large boat with an oaken hull*. It only allowed itself to be seen before some extraordinary or prodigious event, *as the Ancients testified to have heard from their elders*". [**27**]

Cysat adds: "Gesner reports that, in a German lake, when the titled tenant in a riverside chateau is going to die, several days before, an enormous monstrous *pike* is seen". [**28**] And elsewhere: "a monastery at Saint Maurice, at the frontier of Burgundy, possesses a fish preserve, where as many fish swim as there are monks in the establishment. When a monk falls sick, people see one of the fish swimming with its belly up: if the man dies so does the fish". [**29**]

Similar *fish prophecies* can be discovered in the British Isles, where at Clifton Hall, in Nottinghamshire, the family was forewarned of the imminent death of its eldest son by a giant sturgeon which swam *against the current* of the River Trent. [**30**] A fish returning to the source is an appropriate symbol for a man who must die. The great serpent of the Rotsee and the giant fish

FISH OMENS

23 ■ L. Cysat 1611.

24 ■ V. Attinger 1926, vol 3.

25 ■ J. Zeigler 1532.

26 ■ Elisabeth Skjelsvik, 'Norwegian lake and sea monsters,' in *Norveg Folkelivsgransking*, Oslo, vol 7 (1960).

27 ■ L. Cysat 1611.

28 ■ *ibidem*.

29 ■ *ibidem*.

30 ■ E. Maple 1964.

of Lake Zoog have the same premonitory function, founded on one essential and common element: they are supposedly rarely seen. Both are very ancient funereal symbols. From the prehistoric epoch, the serpent has been related to the goddess of death. [31]

FUNEROTIC

Among the fish, the salmon, notably, has been linked to the ancient Celtic cult of decapitation. [32] The choice of a princely family, or at least a noble family, by these aquatic prophets comes, without a doubt, from the salvaging by the feudal establishment of the very old prerogatives of fishing communities, in which only the chief representative could enter into a rapport with the master animal of the lake.

According to a tradition reported by Sebastian Münster in 1598, two monstrous pikes appeared in the lake of Uelman, in Eifel, when the heir of the house of Uelman was to die. "The fish of this lake allow only one fisherman to be their master and recognise only his voice. When he feels his death approach he chooses an heir, to whom he teaches the secret call which brings the fish." [33] The "large pikes" desert the humble fisherman and concern themselves instead with the afflictions of the powerful.

2.10

A FOREST OF SYMBOLS

LEGEND / ANTI-LEGEND
— THE CONTENT OF THE MYTHIC AND THE RATIONAL ACCOUNTS ARE THE SAME
— MOTIFS FROM THE "MYTHIC LANDSCAPE"

In the light of the Indian beliefs, certain "explanations" which we had proposed earlier, at Lakes Aylmer and Pohénégamook, rational as they are, seem now to belong properly to the "mythical landscape". [1] The famous theriomorphic logs, floating on the current, have been presented to us at Lakes Aylmer and Saint–François as the source of "optical errors" on the part of those alleged to have taken them for a serpent–like monster. Very well... Indian legends also bring to light strange solitary logs, floating in the current, leading the imprudent to the Otherworld. The trunk on which the Ojibwa are said to travel at death is, in fact, a water–monster. [2]

Thus, when a witness recounts having seen, in a Wisconsin lake, "a sort of floating tree trunk, of which one part rises suddenly, like a big head" [3] , we are forced to point out *the close correspondence between this supposedly 'realistic' observation and an image of the type familiar to Amerindian visionaries*.

There is no point in supposing a contamination of the mental universe of the pioneers and loggers by Indian motifs. Often it is more a matter of juxtaposition than of a transformation, because the moving tree trunk is also found in European beliefs, notably among the Ugro-Finns and the Slavs. The Finns describe the *Näkk*, their *genius of the water*, as gliding on the waves of their sumptuous lakes, like an enormous log with an eye as large as a saucer, and a mane growing on it; it plunges when anyone wants to sit on top of it. [4] In Russia, an aquatic divinity, *Vodianoy*, appears as a tree trunk, skimming

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[31] J. Maringer, 'Die Schlange in kunst und Kult des vorgeschichtlichen Menschen,' in *Anthropos* vol 72, 1977.

[32] A. Ross 1967.

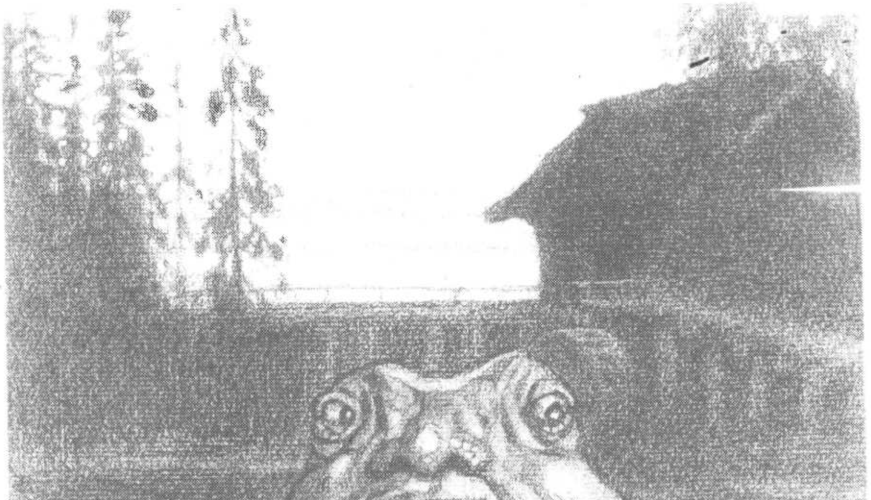
[33] Ph. Wirtgen 1866, vol 1.

[1] My usage of the 'mythical landscape' is further discussed in Appendix 7.

[2] S. Dewdney 1975.
Compare: the "trembling bridge" on the Huron 'River-of-the-mountains' made out of *floating logs*. See: E. Tooker, 1964.

[3] P. Costello 1974. See also the photograph of a log-monster on p253.

[4] U. Holmberg 1964.



The *Vodianoi*, a Russian water-spirit, can appear variously as a huge fish with a moss-covered back, or a winged log that skims over the water.

However, its particular fondness for the water-wheels of mills is analogous to the association between the Scottish water-horses and wheels [see Chapter 2, Section 1], and the 'living wheel' of the Ouroboros [see Note 78 on p30].

In the past, Russian millers would periodically throw a passer-by into the water as an offering to the Vodianoi, as the drowned were believed to become its slaves.

Drawing by Ivan Bilibine (1876-1942). [© Larousse, Paris]

the water with its small wings. [5] The vitality of this motif is attested to by its appearance in the present mythology of UFOs.

In 1945, in Finland, a Mrs. Paasonen saw, gliding on the waters of Lake Längelm, "something in the shape of a tree trunk", six feet (2m) long, which came towards the bank. As soon as it came alongside her, she noted that it acted "like a sort of boat" piloted by two men clothed in green. This story, in a country where pagan religion imagined the water spirits in this form, is particularly interesting. [6]

We have proof of the knowledge of this mythical motif among Anglo-Saxons as an extraordinary portent of death from the British chronicler William Camden (1551–1623). In his topographic masterpiece, *Britannia*, the chapter concerning Cheshire contains the following passage about the Brereton family: "I am going to tell you a story of marvels, and still of the sort that I have been able to verify according to numerous persons of sound mind, to know that they collectively hold that before the death of the titled lord, tree trunks, swimming together, were seen in a neighbouring stream for several days." [7]

SIMILAR ACCOUNT FROM DEATH OF MĀORI KING – IN EPISODE ONE OF 'TANGATA WHENUA' BY MICHAEL KING

The moving logs have the same funereal finality as the

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5 ■ G. Alexinsky, 'Slavonic mythology', in Larousse 1960 [1935].

6 ■ J. Ferguson 1977.

According to *Extra*, a supplement to the Finnish paper *Turun Sanomat* (Turku), for 5 November 1971, log-like monsters have been seen a Finnish lake which compare with their traditional water-spirit, *Näkk*, with its mane and single eye

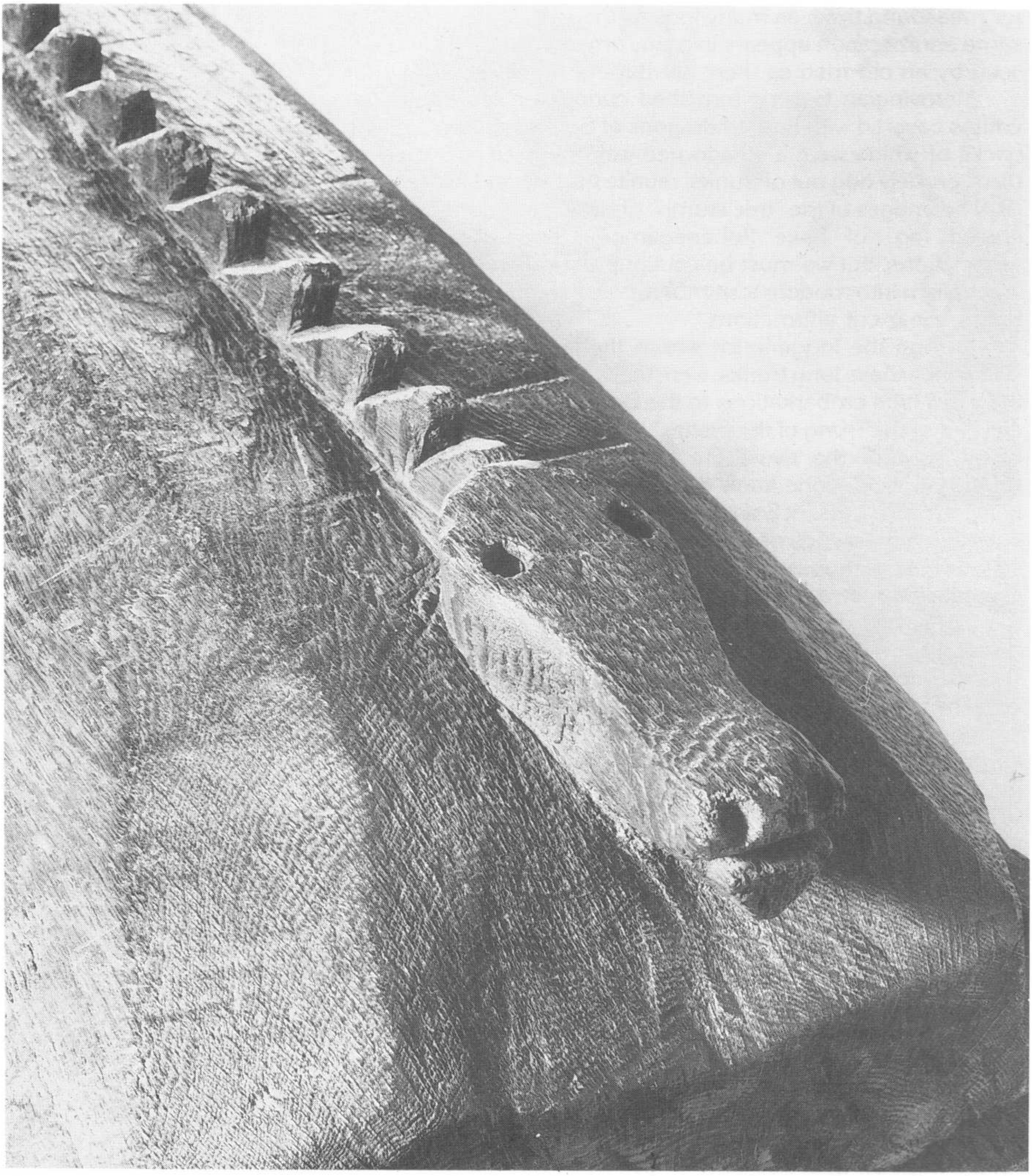
In 1963, a farmer sheltering from heavy rain beside Lake Loukusa, in northern Finland, saw a strange object, 2m long, moving "against the wind". He describes it as like "a freshly peeled log, like those used as raw material in the paper industry". He said it was "a white animal" with a salmon-like head.

A monster was first seen in this lake – 60m deep and with clear water – in Autumn 1958, when a farmer and two others saw a 2m-long creature whose "almost white" body was " like a pig's. (This compares with the pig form of the *Elbst*: see Chapter 5, p257ff.)

Finnish lakes offer no candidates for an animal this size, except for the *"norppa"* of Lake Saimaa in the south-east. These are a tiny population of land-locked seals, 1–1.5m long, in a lake isolated since the land rose cutting it off from the Baltic Sea.

7 ■ W. Camden 1610 [1586].

Christina Hole locates this floating prophecy "on the surface of Bagmere, a lake on their property which is now drained." (C. Hole 1940, p15.)



This carved coffin lid from Zöbingen unites the images of the alligator-like dragon-serpent, gliding through the water with its saw-toothed dorsal ridge, and the tree-trunk boat which also doubled as a coffin, conveying the dead to the Other World. [Courtesy of the Würtembergisches Landesmuseum, Stuttgart. ©]

monster in the shape of the "beam", of Rotsee in Switzerland, appearing before the death of each lord of Gilg. *Sometimes as a simple tree trunk, sometimes as a serpent in the shape of a trunk*, the spirit-warning to the heir is the product of a system directly comparable to that of the Indians, in which an "ordinary salmon" can change itself into the two-headed *Sisiutl* of British Columbia.

The hollow trunk, the most archaic form of boat, was equally the coffin of primitives, as attested by numerous archæological finds, notably among the Germanic peoples. The "beam which floats by itself" is a coffin adrift in the current. The many trunks reported by Camden are, without doubt, a system

THE FLOATING LOG/ISLAND [TIPUA] IS A DEATH OMEN.

for measuring time: as many logs as there are days to live (the same enumeration appears in many omens: as many lights are seen by an old man as there are days of reprieve). [8]

Merovingian Europe furnished curious equivalents in the coffins covered with horned dragons of Southern Germany, the backs of which were also adorned with a jagged ridge. These biers, crudely dug out of trunks, reunite the tree and the serpent. [9] The images of the "tree stump" of Lake Maskinongé, or "the jagged log" of Lake Pohénégamook, may also funerary associations, but we must be cautious lest we project a hidden symbolism into modern tesitimonies; we can make suggestions but no clear-cut affirmations.

Among the loggers, for whom the least false step could unbalance these long trunks, were these not, in a very real sense, the most fatal embarkations to the Beyond? In Switzerland, the coming of the "King of the Fishes" [10] announced the agony of the lord of the rivershore community, heir to the chief fisherman, who alone knew the secret call which attracted the beasts into the nets. At Saint-Éleuthère, an association may have survived in the minds of certain inhabitants between an alleged sighting of the monster and the death of a famous person. Isn't it significant that, according to tradition, it was during a funeral that Ponik had deigned to show himself in 1963 to the crowd assembled in the cemetery? At Lake Aylmer too, the cemetery was mentioned as a place from which the monster was seen.

The simplistic explanation, according to which this last location merely provided a better view of the lake because of its privileged situation, does not hold water. Dozens of other places, equally accessible, look out onto this vast expanse of water. At Aylmer, as at Pohénégamook, the monsters are linked to death: the deaths of the disappearing swimmers. [11]

Certain hereditary omens have established this relationship between the death of a member of a family and the alleged appearance of a certain species of animal. Aside from the lake serpent, the fox, among many other animals, also plays this role. When the heir of an Irish family, the Gormanstons, was lying on his death bed, a pack of foxes appeared on his land and came howling under the windows of the dying man. [12] If Ponik played a similar role, this means, more profoundly than we can suppose, that "Ponik is Pohénégamook", not a real animal but, like the Scandinavian water-monsters, an omen, materialized by floating tree-trunks and bizarre waves. But this status (Ponik as prodigy) no longer corresponds with the dominant interpretation. Whether a zoological oddity or a 'big fish', the monster, today, is only viewed as *Beast* by the residents.

NATURILIZATION / BIOLOGICIZATION
— "FICTIONAL OBJECTIVITY"

One mythology includes elements that we have detected on both sides of the Atlantic. The western Finnish group, represented by the Finns, the Estonians, and the Lapps, shared ideas on the subject of an aquatic divinity, the *Näkki, Nik,* etc., whose different shapes are also those of Ponik and his friends: a floating tree trunk for the Finns; and among the Lapps of Sweden, an "*overturned boat*" on the waves, which showed itself before storms. His coming is preceded by *a bubbling*. In each great lake of western and southern Finland, there is "a bottomless place" which leads to the lair of Näkki. This spirit takes

Opposite, sideways: **Like an old tree stump, half-submerged in gloomy waters, and with lambent Will o' the Wisps for eyes, Theodor Kittelsen's painting – *Nøkken* (1904) – captures the mysterious ambiguity of water spirits.** [Photographed by Jacques Lathion. © Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo.]

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[8] ■ According to Gaelic legend, *Mhorag*, the "mermaid" of Loch Morar is Scotland, "only shows herself whenever a member of a certain clan is about to die." The Mhorag detaches herself from the surface in three distinct forms: "one portion representing death, another a coffin, and the third, a grave." (E.M. Campbell 1972, p104.)

[9] ■ Jolande Jacobi, 'Symbols in an individual analysis,' in C.G. Jung 1964.

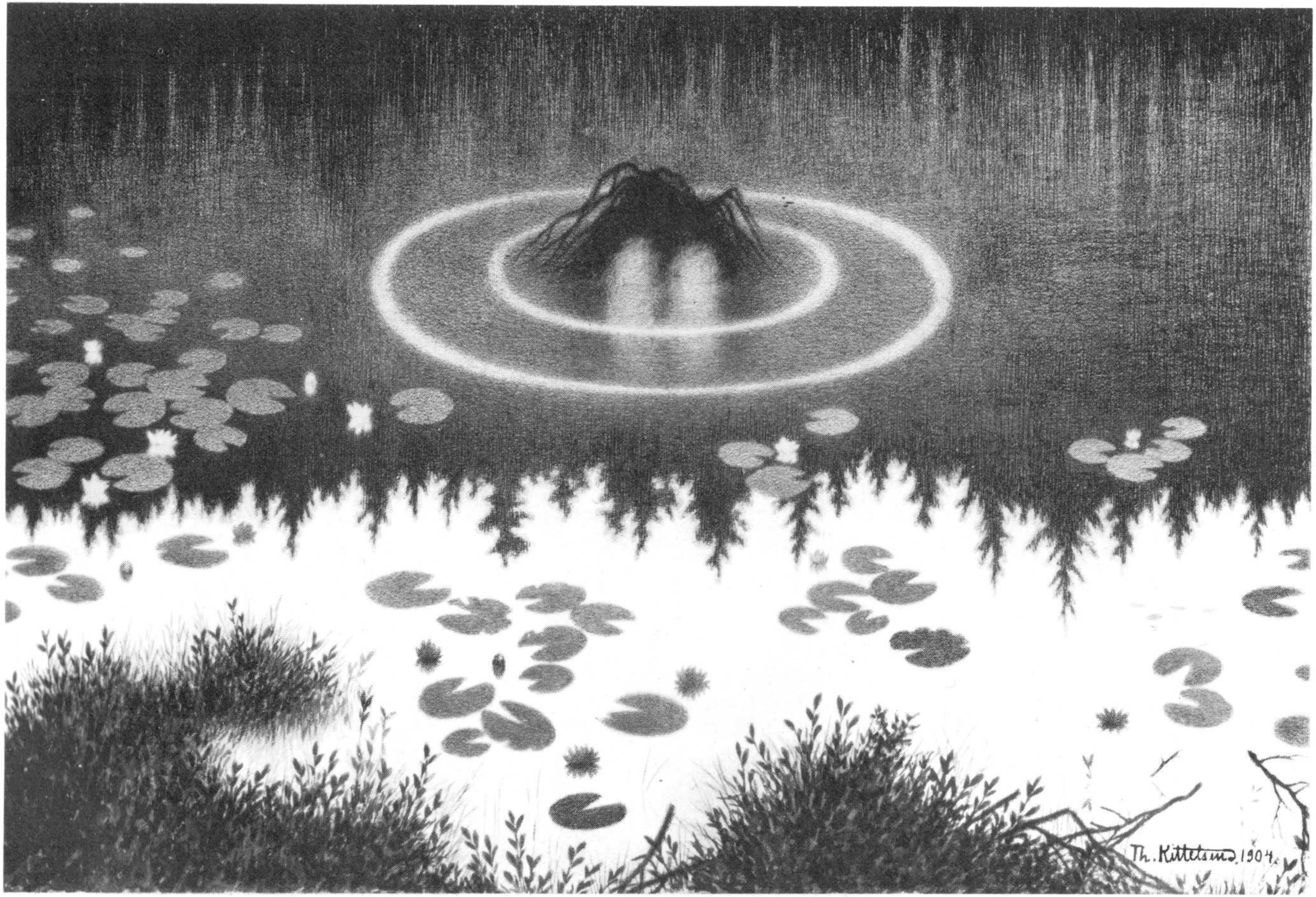
[10] ■ See also: Appendix 5.

[11] ■ Local historian Guy Théberge told me that he had not been able to find any witnesses of the alleged sighting of Ponik during the funeral. This reinforces the thesis interpreting this spurious 'fact' as the survival of an ideological layer integrating the monster into a supernatural world-view.

[12] ■ F.Hamel 1973 [1915].

See also general discussion of synchronous death omens involving animals in J. Michell and R.J.M. Rickard 1975, p114f..

But to me, the Jungian concept of synchronicity, being unprovable, is of no use in a careful discussion of lake monsters.



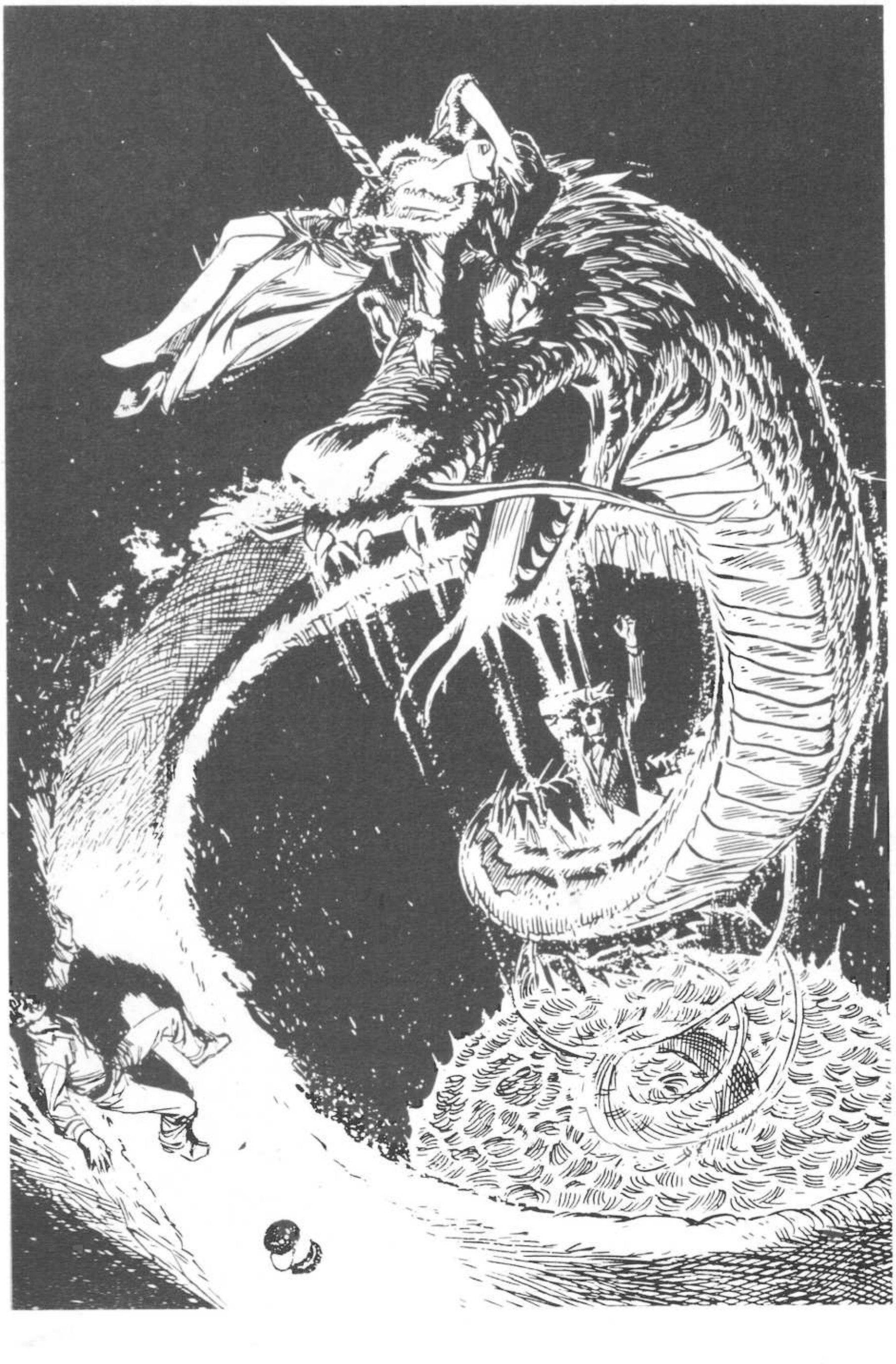
Th. Kittelsen 1904.

delight in making men disappear under the waters, and they say of the drowned: "*Näkki has taken him*". Among the beasts, *horses* have always been its preference.

The Estonians situated the monster at the bottom of *whirlpools*. It possessed *water-cows* – the "cows of Näkki" – which it brings to pasture on the shore; a human could steal one and *keep it among his herd*. They give a great deal of milk. [**13**] Scandinavians, who know this spirit under the name of Nökk, see it as a *water-horse which drowns children*. [**14**].

Perhaps this cycle of beliefs had a chance to pass to the New World, because it was shared by Scandinavians. Nordic settlers in Canada may have brought some elements of their legendary *Nökk* as part of their spiritual luggage; but this remains only a guess. We enhance the term 'belief' because here, with Camden's text as well as with Québecian associations, we cannot consider these allegations of "synchronicity" as *facts*. The cryptozoological interpretation is the naturalizing of legend – Camden's is a supernaturalization of coincidence.

PER THE AUTHORS NOTE
THE PRESENT THESIS IS STRICTLY
ANTI-JUNGIAN — IT FOLLOWS
THE SAME LOGIC OF "FICTIONAL
OBJECTIVITY".
CRYPTOZOOLOGY NATURALIZES MYTH
JUNG SUPERNATURALIZES COINCIDENCE



An illustration by George Evans for 'The house of the Monoceros' (1941), a story by E. Hoffmann Price (Price 1975) [© Carcosa Publishers] **in which a Cornish village seems to be in the grip of dark forces from the past. Young lads are vanishing and the country folk accuse the owner of Castle Treganneth of having let loose the 'Monoceros', a frightful unicorn sea-serpent. The Monoceros was the living 'totem' of the Treganneths, who offered it human sacrifice in a pit, in their castle, connected with the open sea.**

The concept of a family dragon, dwelling below the world of the living, in an 'unfathomable ' pit, at the 'roots' of the clan, is in this case inspired by Bram Stoker's novel *The lair of the white worm* **(1911), in which a prehistoric reptile has survived into the modern era in such a pit.**

More recently, in his *The curse of Loch Ness* **(Tremayne 1979), Peter Tremayne interprets Nessie as the last specimen of an intelligent saurian race, lured every fifth generation in its mating cycle, into the cellar complex under Castle Balmacaan. When these caverns are flooded by the Loch, the Druidic Order of Cathan meets there, calling the saurian to mate with a woman of the Millbuie clan.**

For discussion of these motifs, refer to the General Index under: Caverns (foundation of city over); Connexions with the Sea; Rapport; Sacrifices; Serpent-like WMs; Underground; and Unicorn-like WMs.

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13 ■ U. Holmberg 1913.

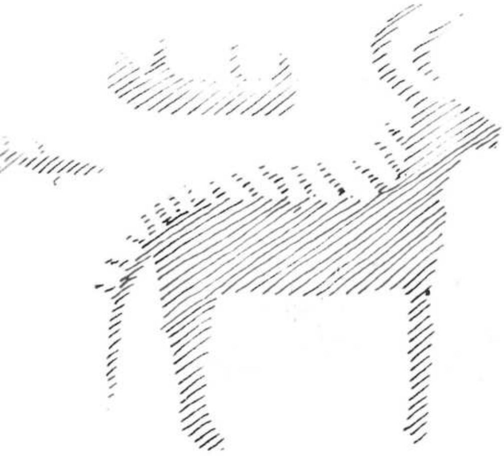
14 ■ T.Å. Bringsvaerd 1979. .

CHAPTER 3

INDIAN AMERICA

3.1

THE HORNED SERPENT AND THE WATER–PANTHER



Drawing by Selwyn Dewdney of *Mishipizhiw*, the Great Lynx of the Ojibwa, on Inscription Rock, Agawa Bay, Lake Superior National Park. From S. Dewdney and K.E. Kidd, *Indian rock paintings of the Great Lakes* **(1967).**
[Courtesy of University of Toronto Press ©]

'None of these men have ever approached me. My only lover is the Great Serpent of Hell."
(*The Legend of Onwi–Menocha*)

Indian America is the Eldorado of aquatic monsters. Nowhere else can you find the same variety, the same splendour of mythic shapes. Like the Europeans, the Indians believed in the existence of aquatic beasts modelled on those of dry land. The Cree of Oklahoma knew, as well as the "water-people" – the numerous ondines and mermaids of the native Americans – our familiar beasts: the *water-calf* and the *water-bison*.

The Cree also avoided the various *water-tigers* [1] just as the Wintun of Northern California trembled before its sister, the *water-panther* with enormous eyes, from the Trinity River, who only appeared during floods. [2] *Mishipizhiw,* the demi-god of the Ojibwa, on the banks of the Great Lakes, was presented by them as an aquatic cat with a saw-tooth back. [3] Its rival, the "water-panther" of the Potawatomis, traded its yellow skin for a coat of leather scales, surging menacingly from the depths and guarding against intruders with its bison horns. [4]

The Huron-Wyandot located the lair of *Yenrish,* the "Lion", at the bottom of Lake Erie. [5] The tribe of Peoria, Illinois, venerated the "true tiger" *Lenapizka* who, according to them, could live on land and in water, and the Shawnee, the *Manetuwi-Rusi-Pissi* ("water-tiger"). A whole bestiary of the waves haunts the rivers of South America with the *Yaquaru* of northern Argentina [6], the *Iémisch* and the "fox-viper" of Patagonia. [7] Other inhabitants of the deep are also dreaded: the "water-dogs" and the "water-grizzlies" are said to frequent the lakes of British Columbia, just as in Ireland the *Bruckee,* a plantigrade, is said to dwell in Lough Shandangan.

The fishing boats of the Carrier Indians carefully avoided a rock on the coast of Lake Francis (British Columbia) for fear of the "water-grizzlies" which could lead their skiffs into the abyss. [8] Cats, dogs and bears haunt the same places; the "whirlpools", the dangerous eddies which smash everything that they suck in; uprooted trees and boats. At the end of the rapids of the Klamath River, in Northern California, the "water-dogs", crouching in the tidal bores, drown travellers. The cadavers reappear with their mark; the body covered with scars was the sign of the attack of the aquatic Cerberus. [9]

The Indian traditions are rich in monstrous fish, like the *Tsemaus* of the Skeena estuary (British Columbia), whose dorsal fin cleaves swimmers and sinks them. [10] This underwater animal is probably the cousin of mythical whales with thin blades from the open sea near Iceland. [11] Undefinable creatures, hybrids, hide in many rivers, like the *Mi-Ni-Wa-Tu* on the Missouri, an illuminated object, projected at full speed, causing the waves to billow in its wake. It is covered with red hair, has only one eye and a straight horn; its body is that of a bison with an enormous flat tail grooved like a saw. [12] This Nautilus, which has not yet found its Captain Nemo, is little known and neglected compared to that which the Indians consider to be the king of aquatic beasts, the "Great Serpent of the waters".

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[1] ■ J.R. Swanton, *Religious beliefs and medical practices of the Cree Indians,* Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 42, 1925.

[2] ■ R.B Dixon, 'Water-monsters in Northern California,' in *Journal of American Folklore,* vol 19, 1906.

[3] ■ S. Dewdney and K.E. Kidd 1967 [1962].

[4] ■ M. Barbeau 1953.

[5] ■ A.S. Gatschet, 'Water monsters of American aborigines,' in *Journal of American Folklore,* vol 13, 1899.

[6] ■ R.P.T. Falkner 1787.

[7] ■ Iémisch - see: B. Heuvelmans 1955. Fox-viper – see: Robert Lehmann-Nitsche, 'La pretendia existencia actual del grypotherium,' in *Rivista del Museo de la Plata,* (Universidad Nacional, La Plata), vol 10, 1902.
See also discussion at length in Appendix 6.

[8] ■ D. Jenness, 'Myths of the carrier of British Columbia,' in *Journal of American Folklore,* vol 44, 1934.

[9] ■ R.B Dixon, 'Water-monsters in Northern California,' in *Journal of American Folklore,* vol 19, 1906.

[10] ■ M. Barbeau 1953.

[11] ■ F.S. Bassett 1885.
There is a legend of a monster with a saw-like ridge on its back in the lake at Goggau, in Corinthia. See: G. Graber 1941.

From Alaska to New Mexico the belief in a horned serpent-shaped water beast of enormous dimensions is widespread. Its names and its nature differ according to the tribes. It is sometimes designated clearly as a serpent, such as *Sisiutl*, the two-headed sea-serpent of the Haidas, of British Columbia. [13] At other times it is the "horned slug" of the Abenakis of the north-eastern United States [14]; the "antlered worm" of the Pentagouets [15]; or the "horned alligator" of the Kiowas. [16] All these tribes make use of the "horns" as amulets for the hunt or for war, and also as poison. The horns of Sisiutl are described as short protuberances [17]; in contrast, the reptile of the Cree is said to have impressive deer-like antlers, and is called *Tcinto-Saktco*, the "long-horned serpent". The Cree knew of four kinds of these serpents according to the colour of their appendages: yellow, white, red and blue. [18]

The forked antlers of *Weewilmekq*, of the Pentagouets, are said to be based on the model of certain deer: one ends in two prongs, and the other is straight. [19] The *Tcipitckaam* is said to be proud of his solitary horn, which is long and twisted, sometimes yellow and sometimes red. [20] Occasionally immense "mottled horns" are described. [21] A unicorn lake-serpent, the *Kinepikwa*, appears in a Shawnee legend. [22] Many tribes, without giving details, mention a "horned serpent": the Chickasaw of Mississippi, [23] the Pueblos and the Zuni of New Mexico, [24] and the *Tzeltal* of the Chiapas. [25]

These monsters have as their territory either the sea (Sisiutl) or caverns near the water, but especially the swells formed by currents, or the unfathomable places in rivers and lakes. That is why the horned alligator of the Kiowas frequents "the gulfs of the torrents". [26] An Algonkin couple, who foundered in the rapids of the Saint-Jean River and lost a gun, were led to portage by a shaman [*"M'teoulin"*], and in repayment the woman agreed to sit on the edge of a cornice under a waterfall overlooking "a fearful whirlpool where nothing could live". She waited in this "horrible place" and suddenly "something came out of the whirlpool, a monstrous head with two forked horns, on which the gun was resting". It was the Weewilmekq, the giant water-worm. The woman was afraid giant water-worm, Weewilmekq. The woman was afraid and

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12 ■ J. Owen Dorsey, 'Teton folklore notes,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, 1889.

13 ■ M. Barbeau 1953.

14 ■ A.S. Gatschet, 'Water monsters of American aborigines,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 13, 1899.

15 ■ C. Leland 1884.

16 ■ A.S. Gatschet, 'Water monsters of American aborigines,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 13, 1899.

17 ■ M. Barbeau 1953.

18 ■ J.R. Swanton, *Religious beliefs and medical practices of the Cree Indians*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 42, 1925.

19 ■ C. Leland 1884.

20 ■ A.S. Gatschet, 'Oregonian folklore,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 4, 1891.

21 ■ A.S. Gatschet, 'Water monsters of American aborigines,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 13, 1899.

22 ■ E.C. Parsons, 'Mic Mac folklore,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 38, 1925.

23 ■ J.R. Swanton, *Social and religious beliefs of the Chickasaw Indians*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 44, 1926.

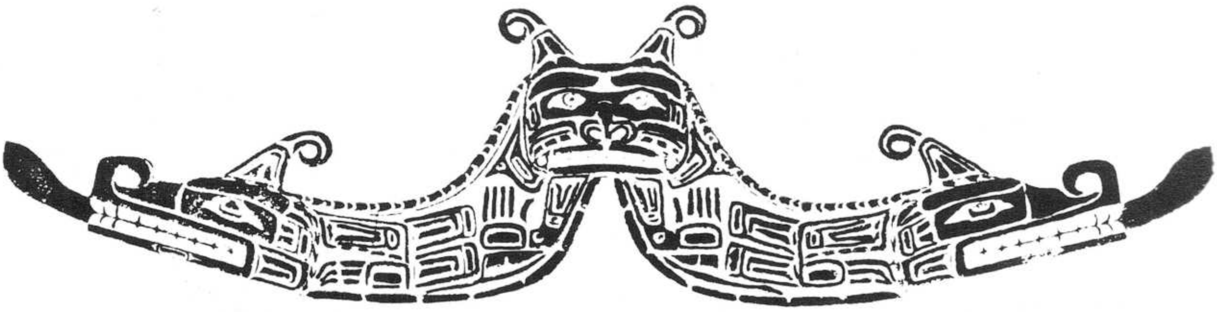
24 ■ E.C. Parsons, *Isleta*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 47, 1930.

See also: R.L. Bunzel, *Introduction to Zuni ceremonialism*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 47, 1930.

25 ■ Brian Ross, *Demons and monsters*, Museum Brief N° 24, University of Missouri, 1978.

The relationship between the serpent and the element in which it lives seems to be archaic, as in the case of the *Misiganebic* of the Algonkians who "cleans the waters... "

26 ■ A.S. Gatschet, 'Water monsters of American aborigines,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 13, 1899.



A Kwakiutl design of the two-headed salmon-serpent *Sisiutl*. **From Marius Barbeau, 'The Hydra reborn of the New World,' in** *Arts Quarterly*, **N°12, 1944.** [© Detroit Institute of Arts.]

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didn't dare to take hold of the weapon: the head submerged again and disappeared. [27]

Fluid and elusive, like the elements which shelter them, the lake serpents are, for the Indians, beings which go through different metamorphoses. The waters where they live are endowed with the property of changing animals which drown into monsters. The grizzly which fell into the wells of the beast *Amhuluk*, in the mountains of Oregon, was transformed into *Atunkai*, the otter-like host of the dark waters. **[28]**

The Weewilmekq of the Pentagouets was originally a small wood-worm, two or three inches long (5–7 cm). Seeking refuge in the water, it grew to the size of a horse; but this growth seems to be more in the nature of a magical transformation than a physical one. An Indian informant told Wallis that to see a Tcipitckaam you have to squat in a brook and tie one of your hairs to a six-inch worm. [**29**]

Sometimes the metamorphosis takes place, in several stages, in front of the eyes of the observer. A Shawnee girl saw, at first, a fawn with two horns – one red, the other blue – immersed up to its neck in a lake. Then it grew and came out of the water. Finally it appeared as a serpent, the *Msi-Kinepikwa* or "Great Reptile". Likewise, Sisiutl, of the Kwakiutl of British Columbia, "sometimes appears as *an ordinary salmon* swimming in the course of the river. Suddenly, *like lightning, it becomes Sisiutl*, with two heads, flicking its tongue, its forehead ornamented with two short horns".

This monster, sometimes very small, can extend its cylindrical body at will to titanic dimensions. [**30**] The serpent-like beasts also have the power to appear as men, like the Weewilmekq, the Tcipitckaam, and other monsters like the Great Lynx of the Ojibwa, whose long tentacle-like tail wraps around the women it chooses. Its captive leaves the lake dwell-

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28 ■ A.S. Gatschet, 'Water monsters of American aborigines,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 13, 1899.

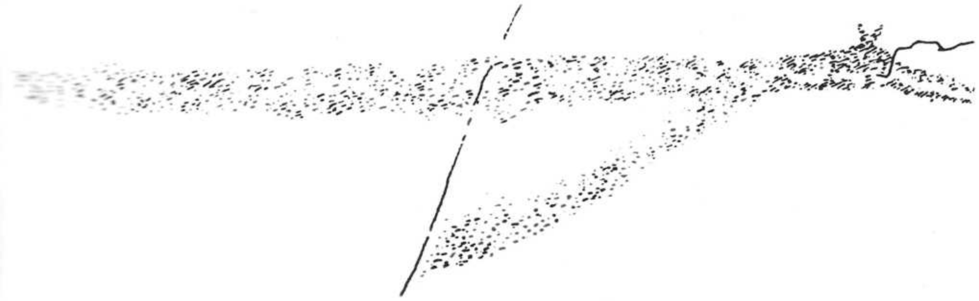
29 ■ W.D. Wallis and R.S. Wallis 1955.

30 ■ M. Barbeau 1953.

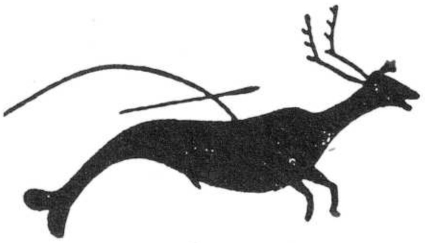
Below: **High on a rock-face in a channel between Sabaskong Bay and Obabikon Bay, to the south of Aulneau Peninsula in Ontario's Lake of the Woods region, Selwyn Dewdney found and sketched this 15-foot long "veritable Ogopogo" as he described it. It was "crudely painted on very rough granite... with open mouth, ears and three large flippers." (Dewdney & Kidd p43)**

At many of the sites visited by Dewdney's team, they found "offerings on a water-lapped ledge: neatly folded clothing and a towel, topped by a little pile of tobacco." (Dewdney & Kidd p42)

From S. Dewdney and K.E. Kidd, *Indian rock paintings of the Great Lakes* **(1967 [1967]).** [Courtesy of University of Toronto Press ©]



ing with "a leather belt around her kidneys", a belt which is in fact the tail of the lynx crouching in the depths. [31] This long serpent-like tail is the distinctive mark of a great number of aquatic monsters: it is said to belong to cats (lynx, tigers, panthers) and to the "fox-viper" of the Patagonians. It is with this tail that the monster seizes its victims. It is also found among the creatures with deer-like characteristics, including the *Wakandagi*, with deer horns and hooves, of the Omahas of Nebraska. [32]



Among the Eskimo along the shores of the Bering sea the white whale is believed to have the power to change its form to that of a reindeer – a transmogrification represented by this design on the bottom of a wooden tray from south of the Yukon mouth. From E.W. Nelson, *The Eskimo about the Bering Strait* **(1896).**

To specialists, these ideas about serpents, panthers, water-bison, and water-deer are essentially the same: they belong to a vast cultural complex spread throughout central and eastern North America. Some locate their origin on the west bank of the Great Lakes. If we examine descriptions of the monsters, the differences tend to come together to the benefit of common characteristics: the crenellated dorsal ridge of the Great Lynx of the Ojibwa appears among the Wakandagi in the form of a hairy ridge all down the spine; the Weewilmekq has borrowed the deer's antlers; the Miztecs of Mexico even have a "serpent-lion" and a "serpent-tiger" as central figures of their mythology. [33]

There is a perpetual transfer of attributes. The world of Indian visionaries has described, in detail, the phases of change by which a young stag can transform itself into a serpent. The transmutations of shape and of nature lead to the consideration of horned serpents and, more generally, the bestiary furnished by these stories, not as an accumulation of realistic observations, but rather as an illuminating revelation. The collective name which the indigenous people of British Columbia give to their lake-grizzlies, their unknown fish, and their hybrids of all sorts is revealing: the "mysteries of the water". The word "mystery" comes from the Greek *mustes*, which signifies "initiated". Whoever is not initiated as a sorcerer or shaman cannot see these beings without fatal risk: to see them is to die. Therefore the Thompson Indians, who paddle on haunted lakes, "turn their heads". [34]

ACCUMULATIVE OBSERVATION
V. ILLUMINATING REVELATION

The emergence of the monster is experienced everywhere as a physiological and spiritual trial which is unbearable for the profane. The sight of the Mi-Ni-Wa-Tu makes the imprudent writhe in pain; his eyes close, and mania and death seize him. [35] Sisiutl brings about bone deformations. [36] There are also stigmata; the projection of characteristics of the skin or the horns of the animal. A child, having escaped the fate of his brothers speared on the antlers of Amuluk, found scars on his own body in the image of the monster's horns. [37]

The apparition is sometimes wilfully indistinct; a sort of mist masking the shape of the creature. The strange body of Wakandagi only shows itself in silhouette, "in the mist, as through a veil". [38] This veil is used for all initiations, the monster not wishing to show itself whole for risk of killing the neophyte. For the Whites, this scenario, straight out of an expressionist film, can only prove the non-existence of the creature. The collective of writers in Nebraska, who in 1939 wrote up a report on the horned monster of Alkali Lake – in the same American state where the Omahas venerate Wakandagi – noted

31 ■ H.R. Schoolcraft 1851 A.

32 ■ Fletscher and La Flesche, *The Omaha tribe*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 7, 1905.
See also: J.H. Howard, 'When they worship the Underwater-Panther,' in *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, vol 16, 1960; and: W. Lindig 1970.

33 ■ E.R. Emerson 1965.

34 ■ J. Teit 1900, vol 1.

35 ■ J. Owen Dorsey, 'Teton folklore notes,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, 1889.

36 ■ M. Barbeau 1953.

37 ■ A.S. Gatschet, 'Oregonian folklore,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 4, 1891.

38 ■ Fletscher and La Flesche, *The Omaha tribe*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 7, 1905, p6.

that the apparition which they facetiously called the "Giganticus Brutervious" was accompanied by a thick fog. [39]

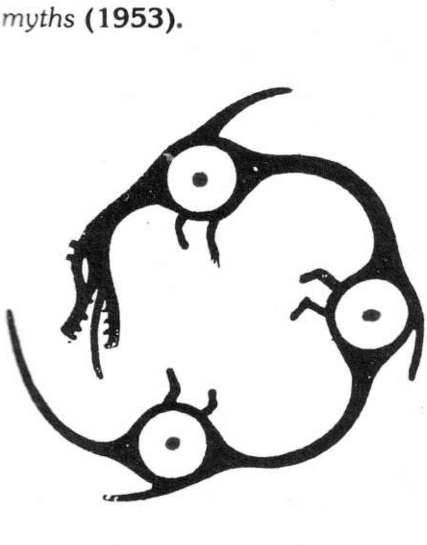
It is inevitable that these Indian monsters – which do not have the nerve to present themselves as naked as an academic's discourse before the pale-face scientist – provoke hilarity at times, and the desire to cut down, at any cost, the great tree of indigenous beliefs. Alas! Those who believe in separating "facts" from "superstitions" in order to find an unknown zoological creature under the tree's foliage, risk reducing the tree trunk to the dimensions of a tooth pick before they have finished. But the myth does not allow itself to be so easily done away with. For this reason, we reject the cultivated bush of the positivists' public garden, preferring to study the sequoia of the native culture. This is the choice of ecologists.

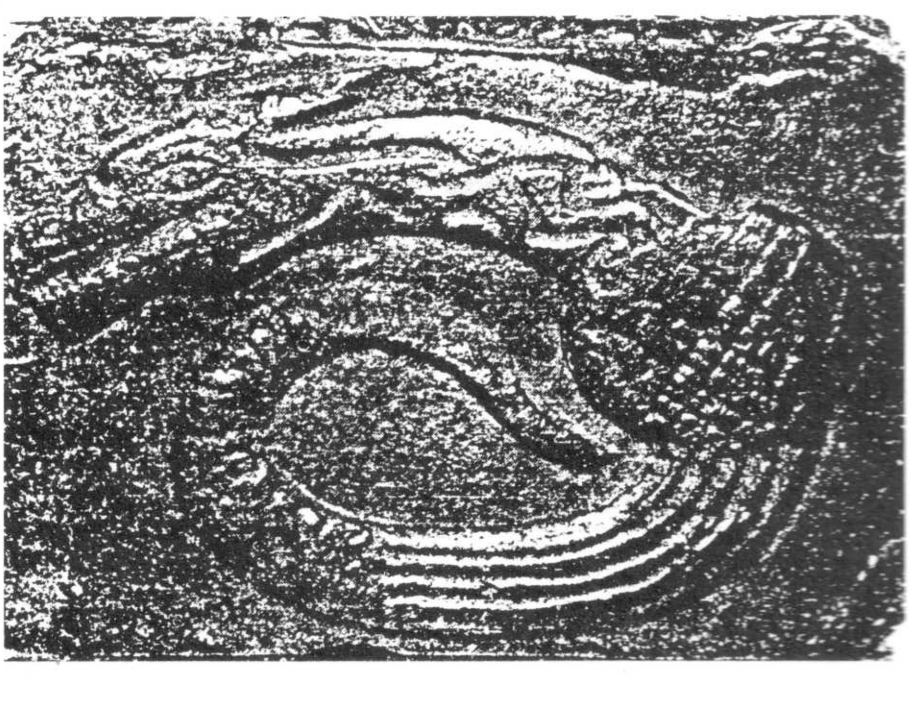
3.2

THE SHAMAN AND THE HORNED SERPENT

The ritual representations of North American natives, both Indian and Inuit, attest to the importance of the Horned Serpent in the indigenous pantheons. The Zunis of New Mexico have represented their serpent god of underground waters and of torrents, *Kolowisi*, as a horned reptile with many fins and gaping jaws. [1]

It is a variant of the water-panther's crest in the case of northern serpents. Other examples are convincing: the sculptures of the Inuit of Alaska and of the Bering Straits depict a type of serpent with short horns, a long neck, and a long tail: sometimes its body is extended, and sometimes in three bulging sections; a small human being is said to be inside each one of these swellings or "pouches" [2] so reminiscent of the humps of Nessie and of Ponik.





Bottom left: **A stylized image of the crocodile-like *Păl-rai-yûk* painted inside wooden dishes and on the sides of canoes by natives along the Yukon and Kuskokwirn rivers. According to tradition the climate in ancient times was more temperate and all the mythic animals were more abundant. The *Păl-rai-yûk* inhabited lakes and marshes, and killed men and animals for food. See p168 for comments on this iconography. From E.W. Nelson, *The Eskimo about the Bering Strait* (1896).**

Bottom right: **The dragon of Alaska. From M. Barbeau, *Haida myths* (1953).**

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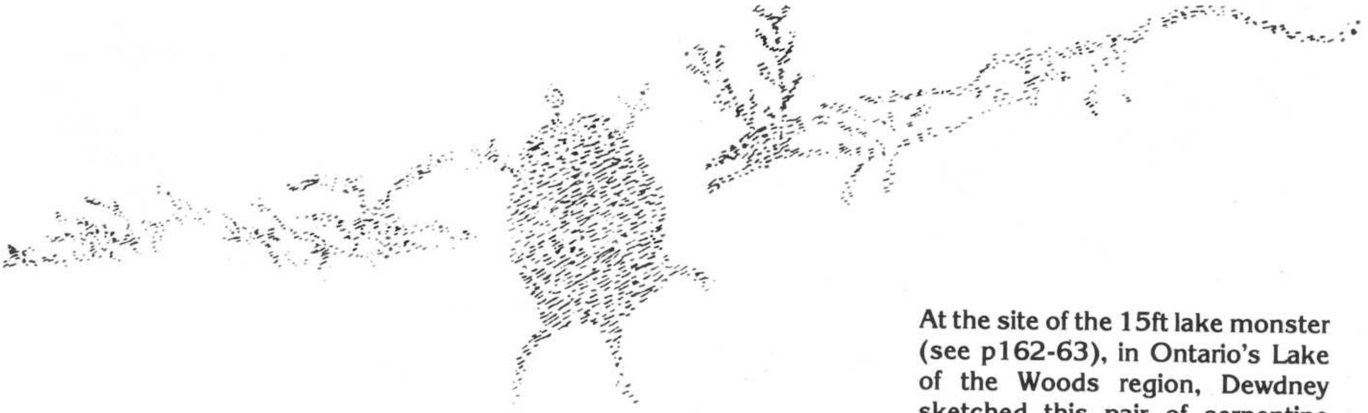
39 ■ P. Costello 1974.

1 ■ E.B. Renaud 1936.
See also: R.L. Bunzel, *Introduction to Zuni ceremonialism*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 47, 1930.

2 ■ M. Barbeau 1953.



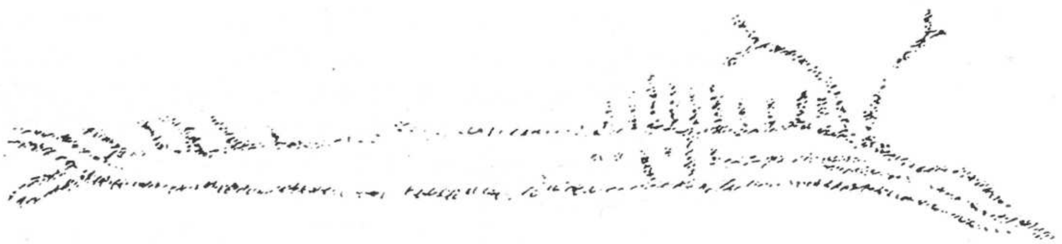
At the site of the 15ft lake monster (see p162-63), in Ontario's Lake of the Woods region, Dewdney sketched this pair of serpentine figures, one with horns and the other with antlers, facing a large turtle. From Dewdney & Kidd, ***Indian rock paintings of the Great Lakes*** **(1967 [1962]).** [Courtesy of University of Toronto Press ©]

In the case of fresh water serpents, the hieroglyphs recorded by Selwyn Dewdney in the cultural region of the Great Lakes, offer a rich collection of images. In a scene from the Lake of the Woods, two serpents, one with its forehead coiffed with the imposing crown of the *Wapiti*, the other with menacing curved horns, confront a great tortoise. Another of these paintings conjures up a "horned serpent-sturgeon", its back bristling with small spiny projections like those attributed, according to tradition, to Weewilmekq. Iroquois myths also mentioned a "serpent-sturgeon". [**3**] The feline demon of the Ojibwa, Mishipizhiw, takes on the appearance of a long-tailed serpent with a saw-toothed back at Darky Lake [see illustration on facing page].

This slender silhouette raises many memories; in his description of the marvels of the Nordic seas, Olaus Magnus described giant creatures, "their backs bristling like a saw". [**4**] We can also think back to the "saw-toothed log" of Lake Pohénégamook. The creature of Darky Lake, with the characteristic horned horse-like head, is quite like creatures in two other pictographs: one representing *Naitaka*, the demon of Lake Okanagan, and in the other from Sproat Lake on the Pacific Coast. C.F. Newcombe recognised the legendary serpent *Haietlik* of the Nootkas. [**5**]

These images, at the Great Lakes as well as on the Pacific Coast, are situated in places where the Indian tradition cosponds closely with recent observations of similar beasts. These places are in some way their domain. Marius Barbeau has indicated that the indigenous names for the Great Lakes refer to the serpent. In Mohawk dialect (Iroquois), the Niagara

Bottom: **At Painted Rock Island, in Ontario's Lake of the Woods region, Dewdney recorded "a most unusual painting! ... a horned serpent-sturgeon, with projecting spines the length of its back." (p44) From S. Dewdney and K.E. Kidd,** ***Indian rock paintings of the Great Lakes*** **(1967 [1962]).** [Courtesy of University of Toronto Press ©]



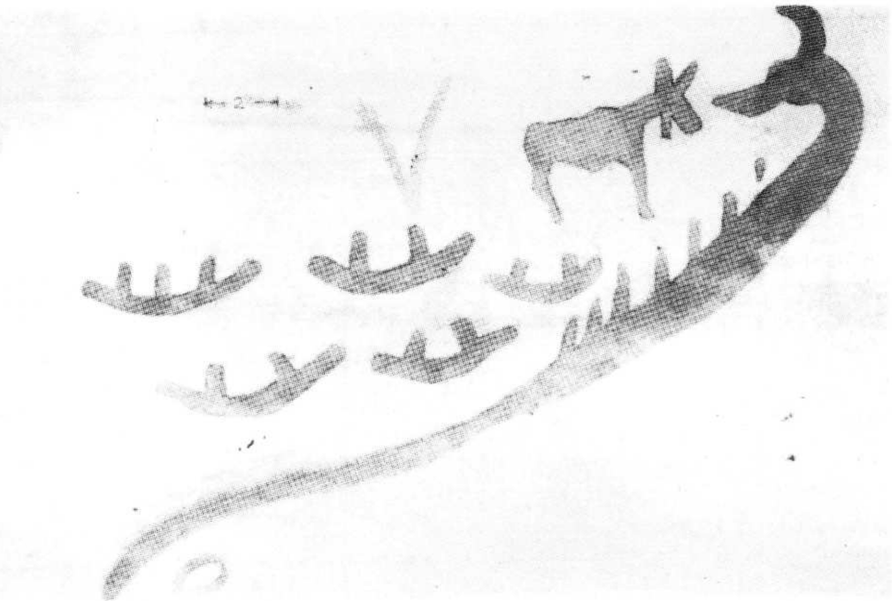
3 ■ H. Burr-Alexander 1964.

4 ■ O. Magnus 1555.

5 ■ C.F. Newcombe, 'Petroglyphs in British Columbia,' in *Victoria Times* 10 September 1907. See also the illustration and caption on pp168–169.

A pale-coloured, horse-headed Naitaka-Ogopogo was spotted, in 1965, at Okanagan, on a rock which can only be reached by boat. Moon 1977.

In the 18th century, the Okanagan Indians carved the head of the monster Naitaka on the prow of their canoes. See sketch in: Moon 1977.



This "likely version of *Mishipizhiw*, and... a second serpentine form..." (p33) were recorded in watercolour by Selwyn Dewdney at Darky Lake, in Ontario's Quetico Provincial Park. From S. Dewdney and K.E. Kidd, *Indian rock paintings of the Great Lakes* **(1967 [1962]).** [Courtesy of the University of Toronto Press ©]

river was called *"Onongaray"*, the "swelling of the serpent". This fabulous creature was said to have dug the river's course while rampaging from its hiding place in Lake Ontario to Lake Erie, the domain of the "water-lion", with which it is often associated. [**6**] Stone carvings on the cliffs overhanging the waterways link the myth of the mountain to that of the lake or the river.

Our monsters – Ponik and Naitaka – are said to be living in caverns which can be reached by a passage opening into the lake. Another aspect of the cult of water and mountain locates the dwellings of monsters quite near an *island* in the lake, as *Naitaka* at Lake Okanagan. [**7**] We think that these details are the remains of an ancient cosmogonic system. The trapper Nicolas Perrot [**8**] gathered stories of this tradition from among the Outaouais: "They honoured the Great Tiger as the *god of the water*, which the Algonkins and others, who spoke the same language, named *Mitchipissy* [Mishipizhiw]. They tell you that the Mitchipissy stays *at a very deep level*, and has a long tail which raises great winds when *it moves* to go to drink; but if it wags its tail energetically it brings about violent tempests. In the voyages that they have made, either large or small, this is their way of speaking in their invocations: 'Thou, who are the master of the winds, bless our voyage and give us calm weather.' This is said while smoking a tobacco pipe and puffing smoke in the air. But before undertaking longer voyages they take care to break *the heads of some dogs*, which they hang from a tree or a branch." [**9**]

THE SACRIFICE
OF DOGS TO
THE MONSTER.

The long, encircling tail of Mishipizhiw is therefore a symbol of the whirlpools in which these terrible water gods are located. This is confirmed by the dream of an Ojibwa shaman, reported by Kohl in the 17th century, in which he calls to the Great Lynx while beating the waters to bring about a whirlwind. [**10**] The sacrifices of dogs to the Great Lynx, related by Kohl, were still taking place at the beginning of the 19th century, when one of these animals, with its paws painted red, was tied to a stone and thrown to the bottom.

On Lake Nipigon, Mishipizhiw had a *rock* for offerings, situated above the water; dogs were thrown there in June.

Continued on p170.

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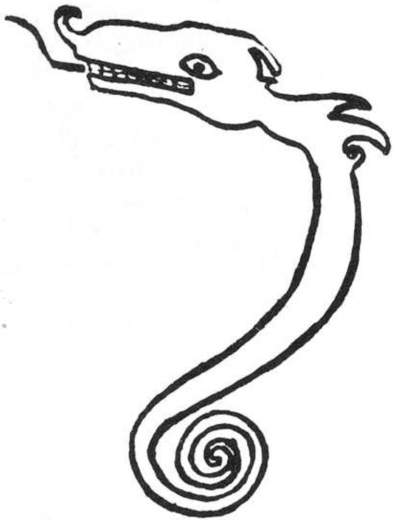
6 ■ M. Barbeau 1953.

7 ■ T. Dinsdale 1961.

8 ■ Nicolas Perrot (1665–1684).

9 ■ N. Perrot 1864.

10 ■ J-G. Kohl 1860.



This petroglyph [above] of the "serpent" Haietlik (or Heitlik) – the 'Lightning Snake' of the Nootkas, and related to the great Thunderbird – was recorded by C.F. Newcombe ('Petroglyphs in British Columbia,' *Victoria Times* 10 September 1907). Versions of *Haietlik* can be found along the whole Pacific coast of North America and inland along the mighty rivers, and include the *Naitaka* of Lake Okanagan.

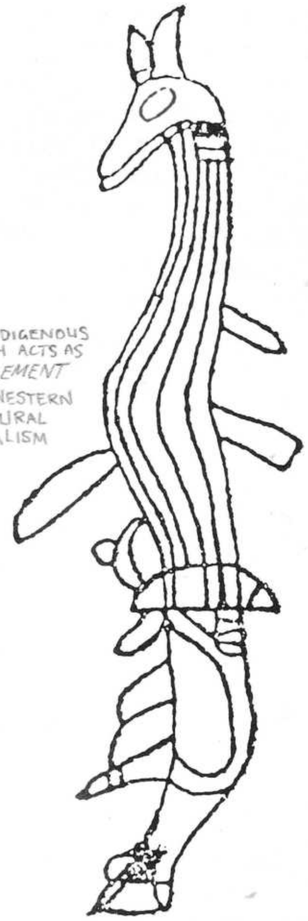
Newcombe's article also preserves a valuable photographic record of two petroglyph sites on Vancouver Island, belonging to the Clayoquot Indians. At Nanaimo a group of three images of *Haietlik* are featured on a flat rock [opposite, top]; while the huge horse-headed design, usually interpreted as representing *Haietlik* [above right] can be found lying on its back, split by a fault, amid designs of fish and game on the rock face at Alberni [opposite, bottom].

The oldest description of an alligator–like monster in Canadian waters is to be found in the clerk's journal of the ship *Columbia*, at Clayoquot harbour on an islet near Vancouver Island (B.C.), in 1791:

"Going on a hunting expedition in a canoe, his man suddenly saw a frightful monster near the shore shaped like *an alligator*. The Indians knew all about it and described it as a long creature with huge mouth and teeth; in every other respect like a *serpent*. They called it *Haietlik* and said it was very scarce... " (cited by Newcombe.)

To guarantee the sailor's sighting, the clerk uses the indigenous belief as a reference, while transforming it from a rather indefinite concept ("long creature with a huge mouth") to distinct saw a frightful monster near the zoological identifications ("alligator", "serpent"). Once it is representable on the level of classified nature, one can meet the Haietlik, and the clerk's quill can record the salior's story as an encounter with a local, well-attested unknown beast.

THE INDIGENOUS
MYTH ACTS AS
SUPPLEMENT
TO WESTERN
NATURAL
REALISM



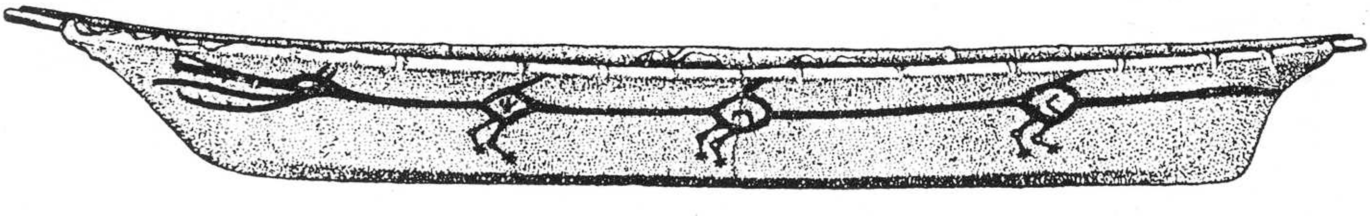
Yet this operation is no more than a translation and a sharpening; the "huge mouth" of the Amerindian belief had been interpreted by the sailor – or by the clerk – as the elongated jaws of an animal familiar to them, an alligator. We will never know what the informant really saw. But it is wrong to try to build the morphology of an unknown creature with such traditional details. The big teeth of the Haietlik, like those of Little Red Riding Hood's wolf, are symbolic features, not realistic ones.

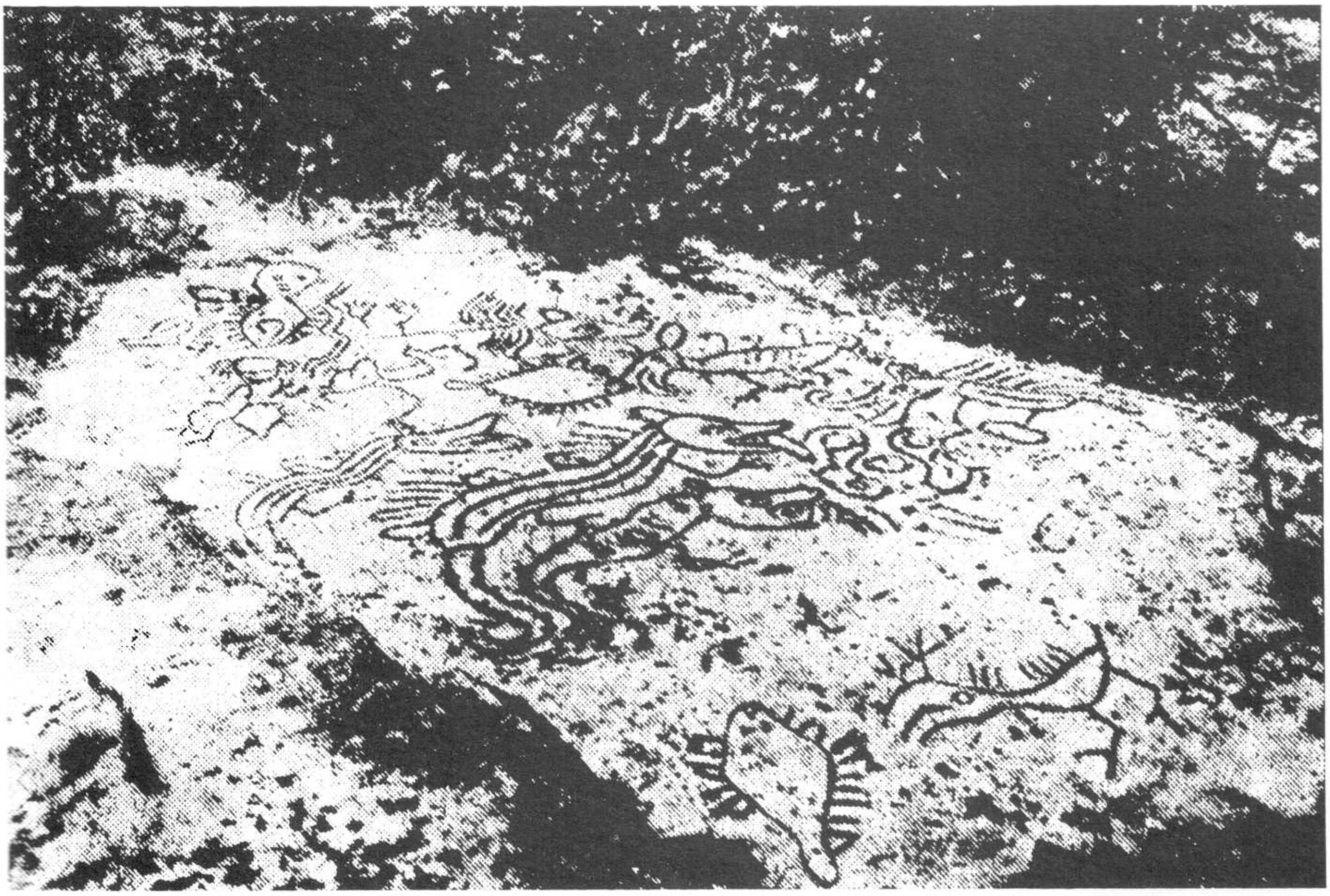
A traditional representation from Eskimo art will help us to clarify the point. At the end of the 19th century, the Eskimo believed in a fearful water-monster, akin to Haietlik, called *Păl–rai–yûk*. They conventionally painted its image on their canoes (*umiaks*) as a creature with a slender body, long neck and tail, big jaws and teeth, six legs and three dorsal fins [see illustration below, and on p165 – from Nelson, 1896-97].

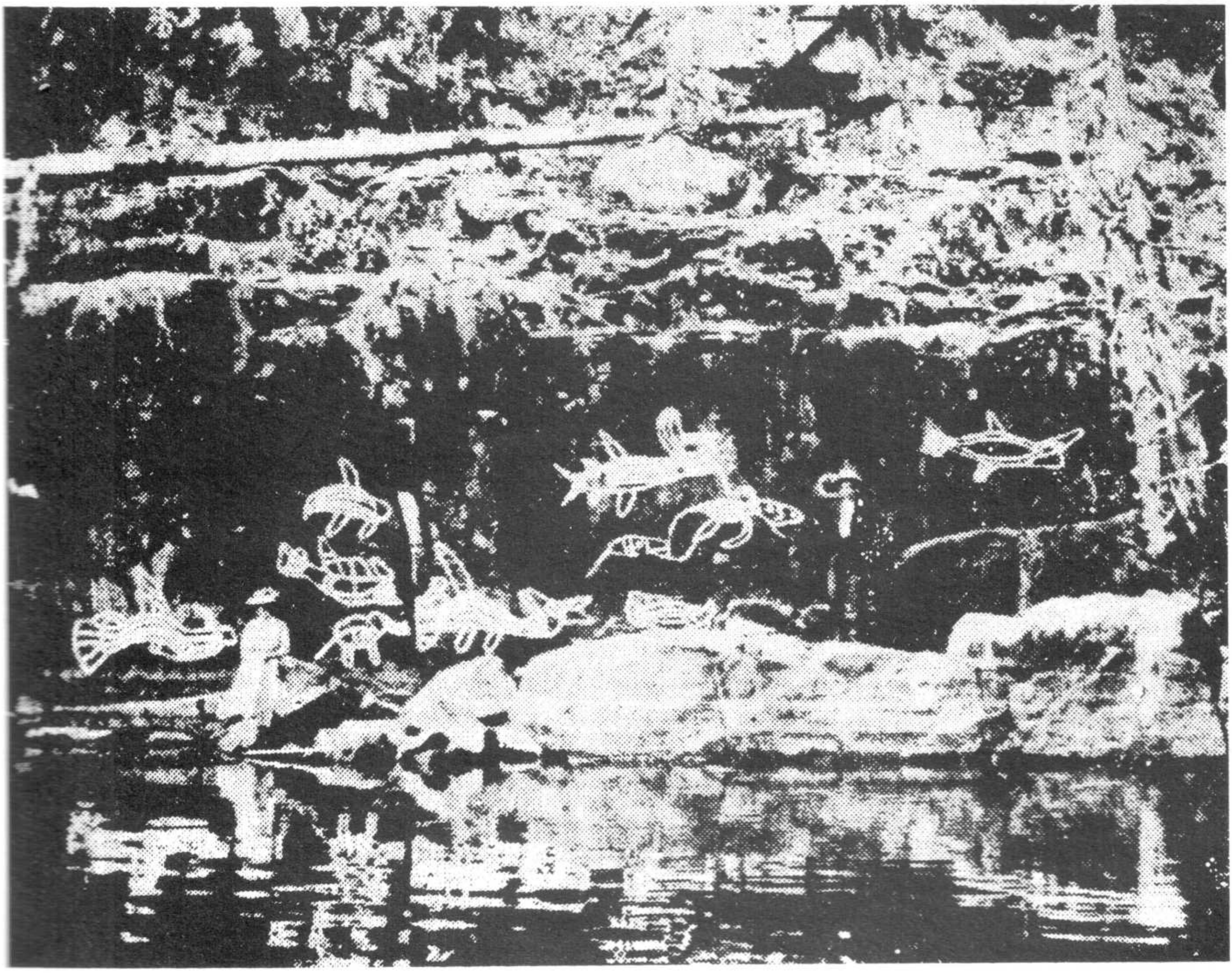
With its three "pouches" the *Păl–rai–yûk* is provided with all the symbolic features of an extreme power: each part of its body is enhanced (jaws, neck, back, tail) and endowed with menacing appendages (horns, teeth). Its multiplicity of feet give it extra speed on land, and the three fins imply a powerful swimmer. The *Păl-rai-yûk* represents the embodiment of the beast of prey, as revealed by the three conventionalized human beings lying in its three stomachs.

For discussion of alligator-like creatures in Lake Memphré magog, see Appendix 3.

[Illustrations: Fortean Picture Library]







Offerings were also made there by the first trappers, who threw traps and guns into the water. Selwyn Dewdney associated the brass scales of the water-panther with those of the primitive *Great Rock* covered in scales of gold and silver [**11**], doubtless an archaic representation of the monster. At Lake Okanagan, as well as at Lake Nipigon, the trappers continued the offerings. [**12**]

The climate of continuity may have permitted the transmission of the image of the "rock emerging from the waters". In New Brunswick, where the Indians situated their Tcipitckaam in Lake Utopia, a witness described in 1954 "a rocky form, black and massive". [**13**] Isn't it remarkable that at Pohénégamook, in a similar traditional climate, "the first White to have spoken of the beast" described it as like "a rock emerging from the water"? When the monster isn't the rock itself, he lives inside it. The Indians think that the creatures represented in stone carvings are hidden inside the rocks, behind a hollow wall. This concept is remarkably realised at the Algonkin site at Peterborough in Ontario, where *giant serpents painted on the rock-face seem to bury themselves in the crevices.* [**14**]

When the spirit living inside the stone intended to manifest itself, it permitted the elect to distinguish the painting which represented it. In British Columbia, such hieroglyphs were considered to be the work of the spirits themselves, *especially those which were executed on rocks above the water.* They erased themselves if the spirit left, appearing and disappearing at the spirit's whim. [**15**] The serpent Heitlik, of Sproat Lake, lives in this kind of geographical location. Its pictorial double was endowed with the powers of the original being. One of these drawings, above Nicola Lake, was avoided by the paddlers, who carefully abstained from looking at it; otherwise the wind would immediately begin to blow. [**16**]

The effigy of the Great Lynx, or of the Serpent, possessed the power of unleashing the waters and the wind. Offerings of tobacco at the foot of the hieroglyphs are said to have had as their aim, in the particular case of aquatic monsters, the avoidance of tempests and storms. [**17**] The water often covered these drawings for part of the year, relegating the spirits to a world of silence, where they could not show themselves to mortals. The stories concerning them were never tales of the winter, when the ice imprisoning the lakes prevented them from hearing. [**18**]

Their emergence in spring, at the time of the forces of renewal and rebirth, inevitably has a sexual character, which the drawings at Peterborough, very well endowed in this sense, illustrate perfectly. [**19**] The transformation of various horned serpents – such as Weewilmekq and Tcipitckaam – into beautiful young men, who carried their women off to their aquatic tent, is the Indian translation of the Greek myth of the rape of Persephone (Core) by Hades. Capricious and evil, the images of the cat and of the Great Serpent were accessible to the most powerful shamans who wanted to receive the protection of these gods of winds and storms.

On the site of Agawa, on the north bank of Lake Superior, a pictograph showing several boats outstripped by two fabulous

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11 ■ S. Dewdney 1975.
It is clear that the petroglyphs and other images were held in great veneration. At many of the sites visited by Dewdney's team, they found "offerings on a water-lapped ledge: neatly folded clothing and a towel, topped by a little pile of tobacco." (Dewdney & Kidd 1967 [1962], p42.) The trappers, traders and others who shared the the life of the Amerindians often continued their rituals at the same places, and for much the same reasons.

12 ■ *ibidem.*
See also: P. Costello 1975.
The "Nor' Westers" – travellers of the North-Western Company - situated the the lair of a cannibal monster in a cave on the banks of the Mattawa River, and in doing so preserved a relic of an Amerindian cultish tradition. This grotto is on the canoe route linking Montreal and Fort William. Given the penchant of the Company travellers for adopting the indigenous rites - such as offering gifts of tobacco to the Spirit of the Wind – one can imagine their continuance of the rites of passage of the rivers and lakes, such as sacrificing to the spirit of the grotto to safeguard their boats. See: H. Durnford 1979.

13 ■ J.B. Sweeney 1972.

14 ■ J. Vastokas and R. Vastokas 1973.
The Iroquois also have a belief in a one-horned serpent, who raises his head out of a mountain near the river. See: Rev. Beauchamp 1922.

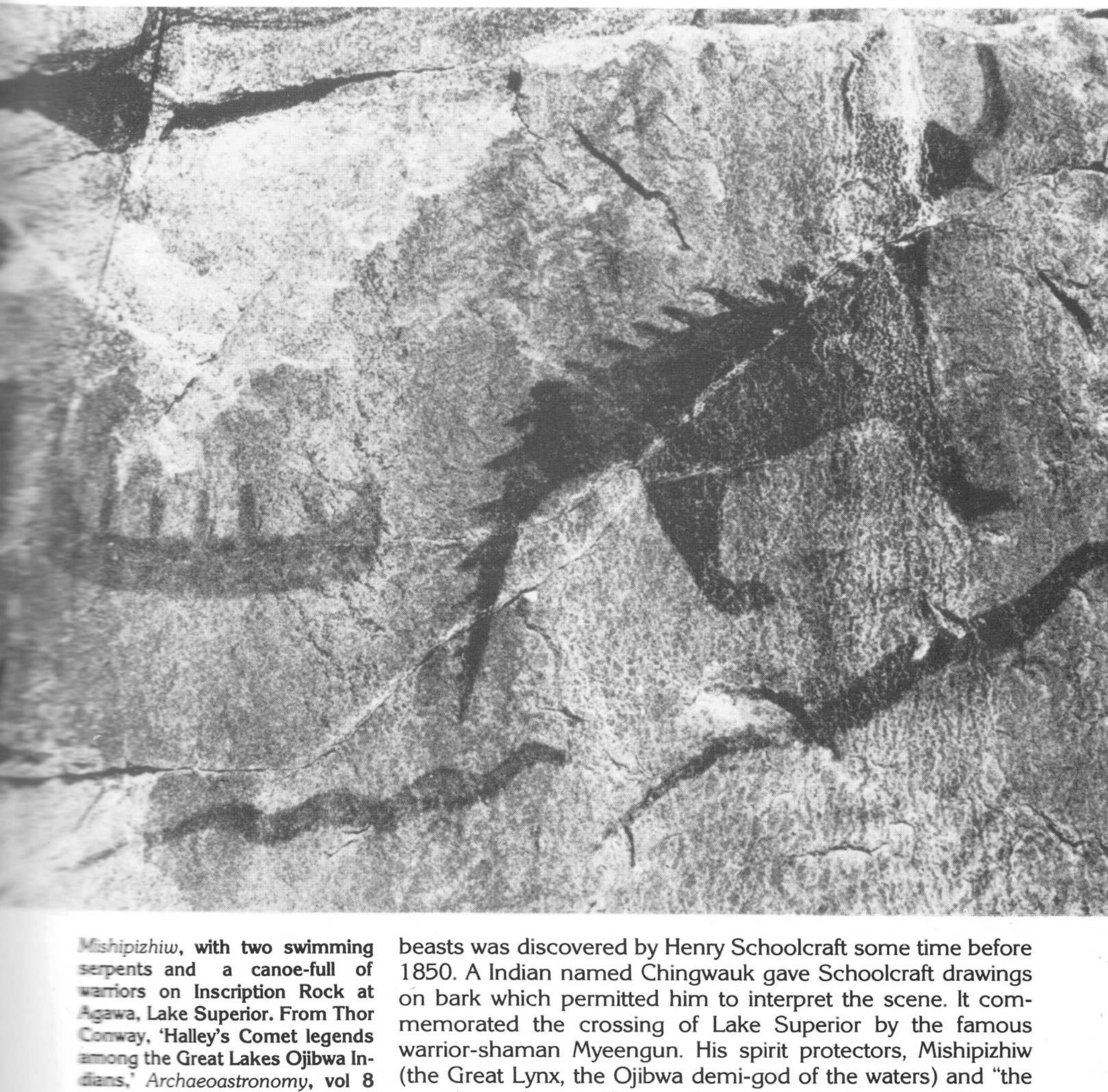
15 ■ J. Teit 1904.

16 ■ J. Teit 1900.

17 ■ S. Dewdney and K.E. Kidd 1967 [1962].

18 ■ H.R. Schoolcraft 1851 B, vol 1.

19 ■ J. Vastokas and R. Vastokas 1973.

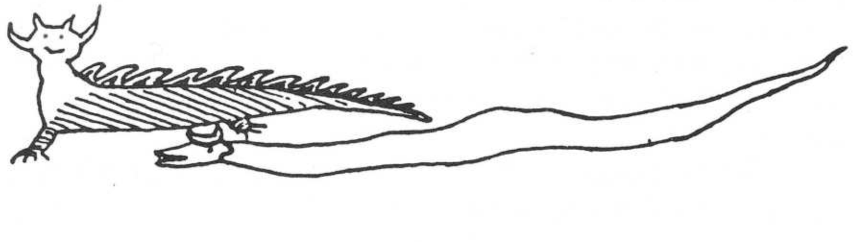


Mishipizhiw, **with two swimming serpents and a canoe-full of warriors on Inscription Rock at Agawa, Lake Superior. From Thor Conway, 'Halley's Comet legends among the Great Lakes Ojibwa Indians,'** *Archaeoastronomy*, **vol 8 (Jan-Dec 1985).** [Photographed by Thor Conway ©]

Below: **Schoolcraft's Indian informant, Chingwauk, drew, from memory, these versions of the Agawa symbols from memory . From H.R. Schoolcraft,** *The American Indians* **(1851 A).** [Fortean Picture Library]

beasts was discovered by Henry Schoolcraft some time before 1850. A Indian named Chingwauk gave Schoolcraft drawings on bark which permitted him to interpret the scene. It commemorated the crossing of Lake Superior by the famous warrior-shaman Myeengun. His spirit protectors, Mishipizhiw (the Great Lynx, the Ojibwa demi-god of the waters) and "the great horned serpent", were also represented because of the aid they had given him. [**20**]

It is probable that the effigy of Naitaka, drawn on the rocks of Lake Okanagan, referred to the same concern for a favourable crossing. In fact, the demon of this British Columbian lake was himself held responsible for lake storms. When they



20 ■ H.R. Schoolcraft 1851 A.
See also: S. Dewdney and K.E. Kidd 1967 [1962].

had to cross during a storm, the Shuswaps armed themselves with a replica which they threw into the middle of the waves to appease the beast.

We possess an appreciable document on a sacrifice to a lake demon in the *Account of Captivity* of an 18th century Englishman, Alexander Henry. Accompanying an Indian tribe, against his will, he recounts their religious terror upon the discovery of a rattlesnake prior to their embarkation on the Great Lakes: "On board ship, the weather deteriorated and the Indians became alarmed, calling frantically to the rattlesnake to aid them. The waves became progressively higher. At eleven o'clock in the morning a storm rose and we expected to be engulfed at any moment. After their prayers, the Indian had recourse to sacrificial offerings to the rattlesnake god, the *Manito Kibic*. One of the *chiefs* seized one of the dogs and, after tying his two front feet, threw him overboard, calling to the serpent to protect us from being drowned and asking that he appease his appetite with the carcass of the dog. The serpent did not relent and the winds rose higher. Another *chief* then sacrificed a second dog." [**21**]

The choice of a rattlesnake as the emissary of the lake monster is understandable, because the Iroquois represent the Great Horned Serpent of Lake Ontario as a rattlesnake in their art. [**22**] The almost constant association of the monster with effigies of boats in the hieroglyphs found by Dewdney would indicate a connection with the protection ceremonies preceding the crossings of the Great Lakes. These were celebrated by the shamans, some of whom we know had the Great Serpents as protectors. On a painting at Bloodvein, a shaman stands above the extended coils of the reptile. [**23**]

In North America the source of shamanistic powers often resides in the mythic animals which the initiate first encounters in his visions. Certain fixed images return regularly as the "signature" of the spirit. The Shastas of California see an *"Axeki"*, a pygmy armed with an arrow. At other times the shaman must place himself in the envisioned drama; among the Tlingit, an otter is shown with its mouth opened and the magician must cut out its tongue. In Eastern Canada, the Penobscot initiate must beat a fantasy serpent's head in order to make it a protector. [**24**]

MODERN DAY CRYPTID
ICONOGRAPHY OPERATES SIMILARLY
BUT WITHIN AN *ALREADY MEDIATED*
LANDSCAPE
REGRETTE ETCETERA:
"THE SCREENAL FIELD OF NATURE"
- BLOBSQUATCH IN THE EXPANDED FIELD

J.A. Teit has suggested that the hieroglyphs of the Pacific Coast had been executed by Indians looking for isolated places in which to experience the visions of puberty; the animals drawn represented their guardian spirits. [**25**] The horned serpents of the Great Lakes were said to symbolise the "water beasts", seen only by the elect, which stayed by them during their voyages, calming the waves with which it could overwhelm the uninitiated.

The Piutes of Nevada wintered on the shores of Pyramid and Walker Lakes. According to them, the first was haunted by a reptile demon who brought about fantastic whirlpools in the channels between nine islands. When waves formed, the natives said: "That's the serpent-devil making the abysses boil like the water in a pot; the Ancient Serpent looking for someone to devour". No indigenous person of healthy mind would approach troubled waters at that moment. [**26**]

Opposite top: **A view across Lake Okanagan, in British Columbia, towards Squally Point and Ogopogo Island.**

The text of the signpost is a little masterwork of naive Rousseauism with racialistic undertones; it opposes, too sharply, the "unimaginative Whiteman" with the "primative, superstitious Indians". In fact, in British Columbia as well as in Québec, the two communities have exchanged some elements of their imaginary worlds, including representations of water-monsters. [© René Dahinden / courtesy of Fortean Picture Library.]

Opposite bottom: **A large model of Ogopogo at Kelowna, BC, on the shore of Lake Okanagan.** [© René Dahinden / courtesy of Fortean Picture Library.]

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21 ■ Cited in H.R. Schoolcraft 1851 A. See also: A. Henry 1809.

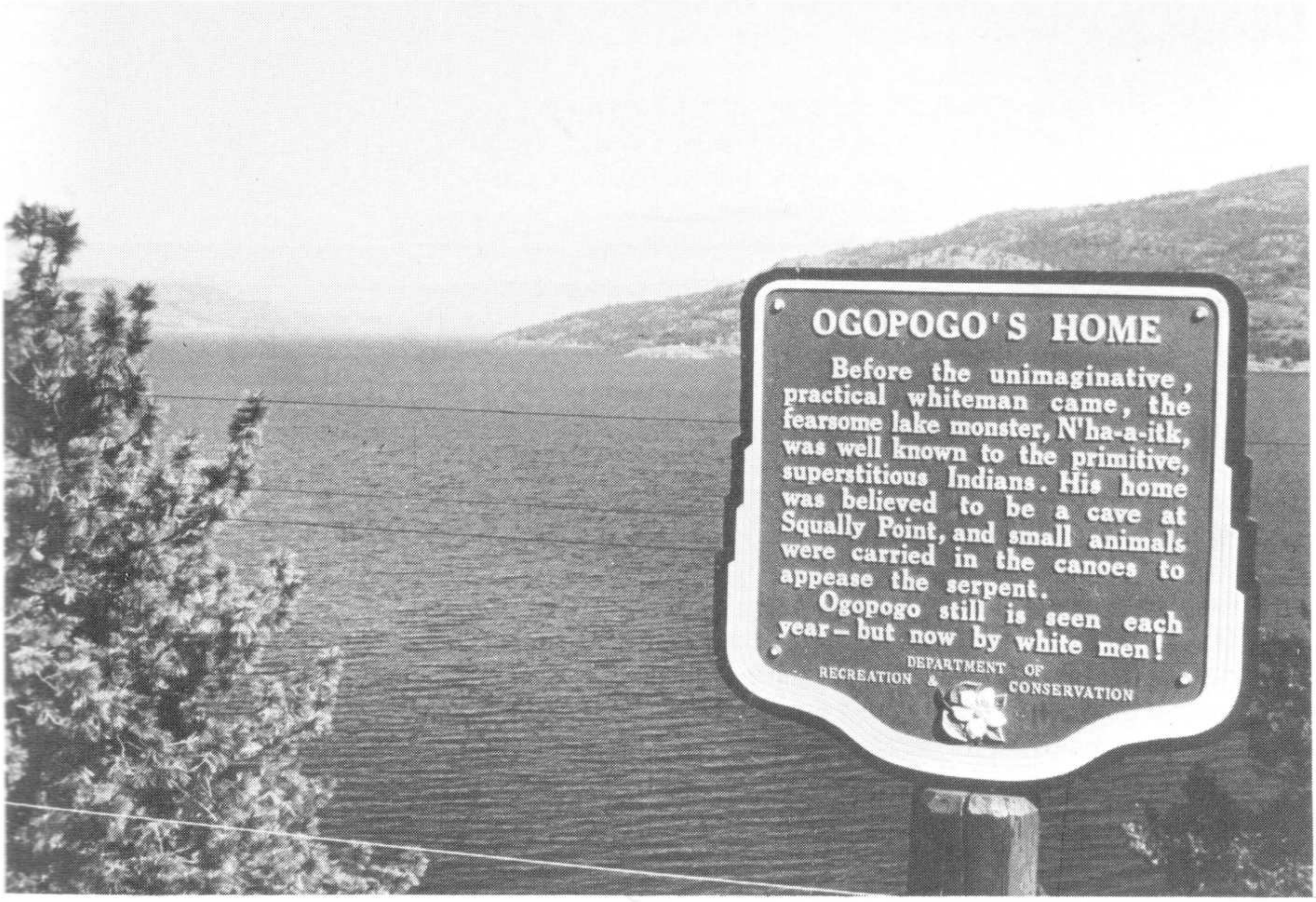
22 ■ H.M. Converse 1908. See also: illustration on p176.

23 ■ S. Dewdney and K.E. Kidd 1967 [1962].

24 ■ R.F. Benedict, 'The concept of the guardian spirit in North America,' in *American Anthropological Association Memoirs*, vol 29, 1923.

25 ■ Cited in B. Hill and R. Hill 1974.

26 ■ H. Bancroft 1875, vol 3.

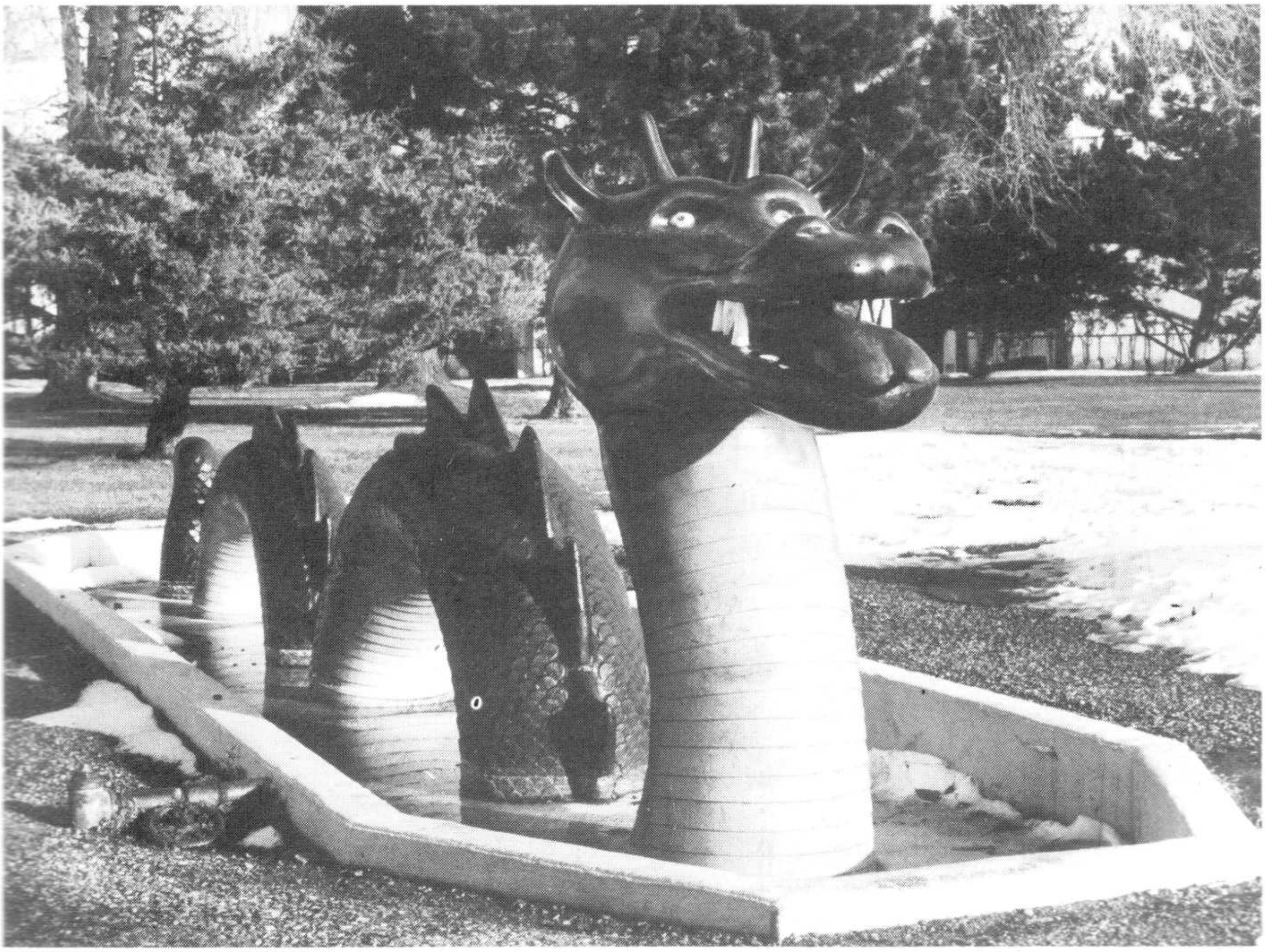


OGOPOGO'S HOME

Before the unimaginative, practical whiteman came, the fearsome lake monster, N'ha-a-itk, was well known to the primitive, superstitious Indians. His home was believed to be a cave at Squally Point, and small animals were carried in the canoes to appease the serpent.

Ogopogo still is seen each year – but now by white men!

DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION & CONSERVATION



Atitlan in Guatemala. According to several traveller's evidence, the descendants of the Maya in the region skirt the centre of the lake to avoid being wrecked by a monster that has its lair in the deepest part of the lake. To this day even the post boat avoids the centre of the lake. [Courtesy of Jaques-Serge Neveu ©] **See Appendix 6 for discussion of the water-monster traditions of Chile.**

The Piute shamans derived their powers from the "Great Serpents" of the lakes. [27] The tribe gave hard combat against the invading silver hunters in the period 1860–1861. When at last they were placed on a reserve, the Indians kept the memory of the warrior pact of their sorcerers with the great serpent. The second lake, Walker Lake, contained a monster which is said to have been seen by a White couple in 1956. According to the Piutes, the beast eats only Whites. [28]

3.3

THE BEAST AND THE DIVER

The choice of cliffs overhanging gulfs, by the painters of the Canadian shield and the Pacific Coast, is linked to one of the shamanistic prerogatives: the underwater descent which he makes during initiation, or at the request of a sick person or someone unlucky in fishing. This dive has an important place in the minds of certain primitive people. The Inuits of North America say: "When he's about to enter his trance, the shaman makes movements as if he were diving". It is the equivalent of a "descent into hell". The shaman must pass through the dangers of crashing rocks, perpetually closing like giant jaws, to encounter the goddess of the seals and of the sea animals. [1]

Among other groups, however, the dive is completely real and is a condition for initiation. Immersion in the ritual places is the supreme test, permitting contact with the animal protector. The Indian has for centuries been an admirable swimmer; he may even be the inventor of goggles, if we are to believe a Peruvian pot from the third century A.D. which shows a person wearing a protective mask seizing two fish. [2] The swimmer who goes to the great depths is considered to be divine; notably in the Yucatan, where a Mayan fresco of Tulum represents the "diver-god". [3] These peoples, familiar with the physiological

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27 ■ W.Z. Park 1938.

28 ■ J.A. Keel 1970.

1 ■ M. Eliade 1968.

2 ■ R.F. Marx 1968.

3 ■ *ibidem*.

effects of immersion in deep water, have noted that, under the weight of pressure, the diver spits blood, a red curtain appears before his eyes, and he may go into a faint. [**4**]

These symptoms have been integrated into the initiation ritual of the tribes in the extreme north of California, flourishing centres of whale-fishing and seal-hunting on the Pacific coast. At puberty, the Klamath youth goes to bathe in the "places of the spirits", the "*Spu-Tuks*", to acquire shamanistic powers. These places have always had a frightening reputation. The profane avoid them because of their danger, inhabited as they are by monsters. At Crater Lake [*"Ge-Wus"*] initiates are taken beneath the waters haunted by serpents, the terrible *"To Kas"* (sea-serpents), as big as trees and furnished with white horns. These beasts eat all men who venture into their territory.

The apprentice shaman chooses this place to swim at night *alone*, and has the stereotype experience of feeling himself dragged to the bottom by the monster. He loses consciousness and revives on the shore, bleeding from his nose and mouth.

The faint – the time between the moment when the shaman feels himself pulled to the bottom and that when he finds himself on the shore – is put to good use by the supernatural beings, who give him instructions by way of dreams. In fact, among the Yuroks of northern California, the poor people taught their children, who wanted to gain strength and wisdom, the precise place for nocturnal bathing in the streams of the mountain, where "a creature would take them to the bottom of the waters and speak to them". [**5**] The visions of asphyxia, structured by collective representations of monsters, have certainly played a preponderant role in these rituals.

A more archaic variation on this underwater removal was the rite of drowning, well known in the Yurok initiations. [**6**] The diver goes at night to an isolated water hole in the mountain, and while he is bathing, a monster drags him under the surface and devours him. [**7**]

The connection of water and fire (eg. a dragon) is concretised by the choice of a volcanic lake, and is particularly evident in the north of California. Jaime de Angulo describes the lakes where a neighbouring people, the Achómawi, go on their quest for powers. Above the mountain the young Indian discovers the lake, the "*tinihowi-t*" ("the mysterious place"). "*These lakes are always old craters*, not very wide, but extremely deep. From the edges of the crater you can see through the water's surface very far down, perhaps two or three hundred fathoms, almost free of embankments, and the interior walls of the ancient crater are so steep that very few trees can take root. A truly haunted place, infinitely solitary, and without the least trace of human life."

The neophyte goes to the edge of the abyss on the advice of the elder: "Try to go to the summit before the sun has disappeared. On the summit you will find a lake. It is a terrible place; it is a place full of fear. There are many *Tinihowis* (spirits), who live in the lake. Dive into the lake. Throw yourself there head first. Don't be afraid. You are going to die. But if you are destined to see a Tinihowi, he will save you." [**8**]

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[4] ■ L. Spier 1930.

[5] ■ A.L. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 78.

[6] ■ M. Eliade 1968.

[7] ■ A.L. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 78.

[8] ■ J. de Angulo, 'La psychologie religieuse des Achumawi,' in *Anthropos*, vol 23, 1928.

3:4

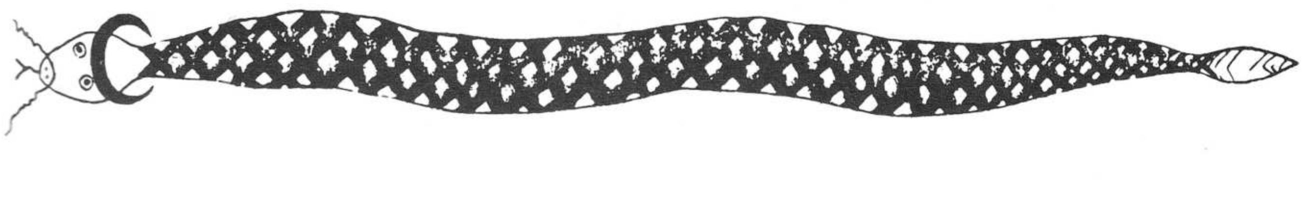
THE GIANT LEECH

One can define the dives of the Klamath shamans as the ritual revival of the drowned. In the diver's encounter with the monster, other elements of the mythic landscape of our Québecois lakes are found: the whirlpool and the cavern, for example. Neighbours of the Klamaths, the Naskallys, make their young people go down to the bottom of whirlpools with a stone in their fist. The adolescents emerge from there and faint, stretched out on the bank. For the Wishrams, the test consists in swimming under the waters to reach the deep caverns where the spirits reside. [1] Here, as in Europe, the funnel of currents and the "great cavern" can be substituted for the snatching mouth of the monster. As in Europe, the place where the monsters live is, among the Klamaths and many other tribes, indicated by an eruption of bubbles on the surface. [2]

The Shuswaps traditionally site the places of the water–spirits – sirens, frogs and prodigious serpents – "in lakes, *principally those which have no spillway*". [3] We will see, in relation to a Swiss lake, this absence of a 'safety–valve' to release the overflow, indicated, for those who dwelled in its environs, the existence of an underground river, sometimes linked to another expanse of water. The Shuswaps also knew these traditions, as they tell of a painted stick thrown into a stream coming out several days later in the Fraser River. Adolescents sleep near the stream in order to have visions. [4]

The European theme of the monster living in an unfathomable gulf, communicating with other bodies of water, has numerous parallels in Amerindian traditions. At the juncture of the Valley River with the Hiwassee, at Murphy, North Carolina, the Cherokees called a point *Tlanusi'yi*, "the place of the leech"; there the water bubbled and foamed because it hid a leech as large as a house. It had a red body with white zebra stripes. One could see it roll itself into a ball, then extend itself full length on a rock above a gulf in the river. It squirts a column of spray at observers and drags them to the bottom, and their bodies are later found on the bank with ears and nose devoured.

The abyss of the leech is said to be immense; more than a thousand feet (300m) deep and to communicate, according to reports of 1848, with the other river, the Hiwassee, two miles (3.3km) from another "place of the leech", where the monster of the Valley River makes the surface of the water boil. [5] A problematic detail: the leech is said to possess wings. Not even a director of catastrophe films has had the audacity to imagine a monstrous leech clattering its wings against skyscrapers.



The horned serpent of the Iroquois. From H.M. Converse, *Myths and legends of the Iroquois* **(1908).** [Fortean Picture Library]

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[1] ■ L. Spier 1930.

[2] ■ *ibidem.*

[3] ■ J. Teit 1904.

[4] ■ *ibidem.*

[5] ■ J. Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 19, 1898.

JONAH AND THE MANED SERPENT

The descent of the Indian shaman provides a mythic landscape comparable to the environment of the European and Québecois lakes. Lake Ontario is, in this regard, quite interesting. The cavern at the head of the lake was particularly avoided by the Mississaguas, who, because of constant detonations which came from there, called it "*Manito–ah–wigwam*", the "House of the Devil". [**6**] Here, as in Scandinavia – at Vättersee and on the coast of Norway – these explosions are linked to the swellings of the monster. [**7**] This horned serpent was challenged by the Iroquois hero Gun–No–Da–Ya. In vain the archer tried to pierce the coils of the beast; his arrows only reached the froth created by its tail. The serpent resolved to make him his ally. "I am your friend and I will teach you how to harpoon fish at night. I will reveal all of the secrets of the waters. Come with me. I will guide you to my dwelling in the rocks, at the bottom, where the sun never shines. Come and comb my long mane; it is heavy with the fish which are tangled in it."

Gun–No–Da–Ya resisted the temptation and bent his bow. But the reptile, who was faster, overwhelmed and swallowed him. It required all of the energy of the Thunder, the mortal enemy of the serpent, to draw the hero out of the underground caverns. [**8**]

Marius Barbeau has shown the ambivalent nature of this serpent, presented here both in its sinister guise, and as the protector of the Serpent's clan among the Huron–Wyandots. [**9**] Like the Scottish water–horse and the "Great Lynx" of the Ojibwa, the Horned Serpent takes girls down to his watery lair. His propositions to the hero Gun–No–Da–Ya are typical of those of the protector spirit, offering his fishing secrets to the initiated.

The request that he comb its mane, reminiscent of the mane of Ponik, is a reminder of the shamanistic rite of the Inuks, going in trance to visit the Mother of Seals: "He must comb its hair, tangled by the sins of men". [**10**] Being swallowed, and the sojourn in the stomach of the serpent, completes the elements of this veritable descent into underwater hell, comparable to those of the Klamaths and the Yuroks.

At Lake Ontario and also at Lake Superior, storms were, according to the Iroquois, provoked by the anger of the horned serpent, who "turned back the waters" for vengeance. [**11**] The appeasing offerings, destined for the spirits of the angry waters – which at Lake Ontario were nothing more than black dogs [**12**] – were addressed to a being of the same type as Naitaka from Okanagan. In 1835 a "horned serpent" was observed in Lake Ontario. [**13**]

The history of the Iroquois hero is linked to the cycle of the *"dragon slayer"*, which can be found among the Menominees, in which Manabush was swallowed by *Mashenomak*, an aquatic monster and killer of fishermen. He found his brothers in the caverns of the monster's belly, which he pierced to liberate the others who had been swallowed. [**14**] The shaman possessed exceptional powers over the Great Sea-serpent. The Weewilmekq of the Algonkians had its retreat

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6 ■ A.F. Chamberlain, 'Notes on the Mississauga Indians,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, 1888.

7 ■ M. Barbeau 1953.

8 ■ H.M. Converse 1908.

9 ■ M. Barbeau 1953.

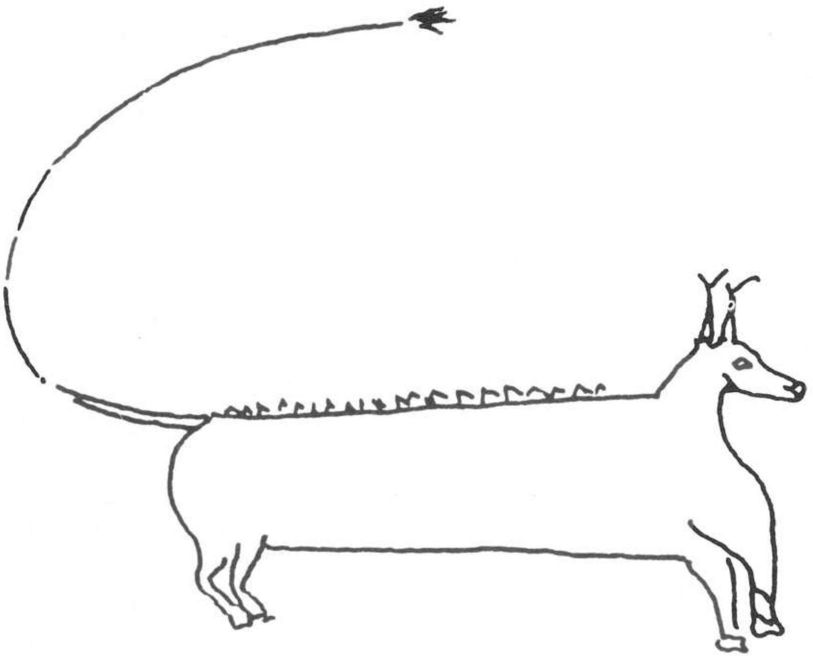
10 ■ M. Eliade 1968.

12 ■ H.M. Converse 1908.

11 ■ A.F. Chamberlain, 'Notes on the Mississauga Indians,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, 1888.

13 ■ *Notizen aus dem Gebiete der Natur*, August 1835. (Ex. BN Paris: S.8119/63.)

14 ■ H. Burr-Alexander 1964.



"The terrible *Wakandagi*... "
[Fortean Picture Library]

the waterfalls, where the profane could raise it under his guidance, as we have stated. It could also be killed; tradition speaks of a shaman returning from combating a Weewilmekq "smelling like a fresh fish". [**15**]

The shaman could likewise transform himself into a Great Serpent in order to combat a rival, in the well–known tradition of shamans taking animal form, of which one can find examples throughout Europe, notably in Hungary. Medshelemet, the powerful magician of the Passamaquoddys of Maine, finding himself at odds with a fellow Micmac, arranged to resolve their differences in a magical duel in the waters of Boyden Lake (Washington County, Maine). Medshelemet metamorphosed himself into a Weewilmekq, the horned worm or slug, while his opponent became *"Kitchi–at'husis"*, the Great Serpent, 40 feet long. During their struggle they raised *whirlpools* in the water by turning round about each other to such an extent that the lake has stayed troubled until the present day, as its name "*Nesseyik*" designates. Medshelemet finished by vanquishing his opponent and attaching the cadaver to a promontory above the waters. [**16**] There were also brotherhoods of magicians linked to mythic reptiles. In his *Description of New Holland* (1631), in which he depicts the manners of another Algonkian group, the Lenapes of New York Bay, Wassenaer calls their shamans the "*Kitzinackas*" or "Big Serpents". They prepared the offerings that the sacred beast came to look for at the time of its periodic celebration. [**17**]

The members of the water–monster fraternity among the Omahas boast of personal encounters with the divinity of their brotherhood, the terrible *Wakandagi*, who, instead of devouring them on the spot, as he would most mortals, granted them powers of shooting magic arrows into the bodies of their enemies. The waters frequented by the monster are very dangerous for the uninitiated. An old Indian who often went fishing on a small lake in the reservation, a place well liked by Wakandagi, was eventually fished out of the lake dead. The monster engages in duels with members of the community by throwing balls of water at them; if they cannot throw them back,

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15 ■ C. Leland 1884.

16 ■ A.S. Gatschet, 'Water monsters of American aborigines,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 13, 1899.

17 ■ Cited in D. Brinton 1885.

the liquid spheres explode, killing the Indians, leaving their bodies swollen. [**18**] There are half-erased pictographs representing Wakandagi. Their authors are said to be shamans who had visions of him a long time ago.

AN UNUSUAL CROSSING OF THE ACHERON

A fascinating myth, recording the celebrations of water–monsters exists among the Caughnawaga Indians, a group among the Mohawks (Iroquois) from the reservation near Montréal. According to this myth, there exists, surrounding the village of Caughnawaga on the Saint–Lawrence, a mysterious gulf *which no one has been able to fathom*, beyond which raucous and sad cries, resembling those of cranes, were heard coming from an island in the river.

Despite ancient warnings, an Indian, Da–Ra–Sa–Kwa ["Moss–Collector–of–the–River"] swam too close to the haunted deep. Looking for a trunk which could serve him as a diving board, he discovered what seemed to him to be a water–logged tree–trunk, lying beneath the surface. When he put his feet on it, "The trunk began to move under him and glided in the direction of the gulf; he noticed, horrified, that his feet were stuck fast to the rotten bark." After this 'living log', a humanoid figure appeared and dragged him into the abyss, where he found, in a bark hut, a family of naked people. His guide offered him one of their *coats of snakeskin*, and a hood, *crowned with antlers*. As soon as the Mohawk put it on, he was transformed into *Oniare*, a giant water–serpent with a scaly skin and "with antlers bristling on his forehead". The others followed his example, and soon a band of giant serpents were playing in the rapids, "unrestrained, thundering as they playfully chased after each other, full of joy and excitement". [**19**]

This vision of the monsters, sporting in the middle of the rapids, is familiar to us. The solitary moving trunk is a supernatural vehicle, well known to the Indians, and signals in this tradition a descent into the Otherworld. A lake near Foster Bar, in British Columbia, is said to be haunted by solitary floating tree–trunks and "dogs" which come and go. [**20**] Among the Chinooks in the same province, a young man, whose sister had been taken away by the spirits, asked *an old burnt tree–trunk*: "Where do men go when they are dead?" The tree agreed to take him there. "The boy pushed the tree into the water and the trunk transported him to the land of the spirits." [**21**]

The horned, hooded coat is a means of transformation analogous to the wolf's skin of the European and the Québecois were–wolves. It also recalls the reindeer helmet of the Altaic shamans and the antlers worn by certain Indian medicine men. The legend of Da–Ra–Sa–Kwa has many points in common with the foundation myths of the *brotherhood of magical healers* dressed in animal skins. An Olmec pictograph, found in the cavern of Oxtitlan in Mexico, represents a warrior wearing a serpent mask, perhaps a "serpent knight", next to drawings of dragons. [**22**] But next to this socialised character, the cycle of traditions around the Great Lake–Serpent presents another,

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18 ■ R.F. Fortune, 'Omaha secret societies,' in *Columbia University Contributions in Anthropology* (NY), vol 14, 1932.

19 ■ M.R. Harrington, 'Da-Ra-Sa-Kwa,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 19, 1906.

20 ■ J. Teit 1900, vol 1.

21 ■ H.R. Rieder 1952.
Isn't this "old burnt tree-trunk" reminiscent of "living" carbonised log of Moffat Lake? See Chapter 1, p82.

22 ■ P.D. Joralemon, 'A study in Olmec iconography,' in *Studies in Precolumbian Art and Archæology* (Washington), vol 7, 1971.

more negative, character: his faithful are seen as pariahs, enemies of the community.

THE WOMAN WHO LOVED A LAKE–SERPENT

The Mohawks speak of the disappearances of human beings, provoked by the Oniares. The daughters of these Serpents are so beautiful that sometimes men will leave their tribe and plunge into the rivers to join them. They never return. The Passamaquoddys of New England tell of the misadventures of a female Bluebeard who married five men in succession, all of whom died shortly after their weddings. The sixth, forewarned, followed his wife to the banks of a stream in the forest, where he saw her, seated, intone a chant. Then "a great foam gushed to the surface of the water and, in the foam, the tail of a giant serpent loomed up. The woman, who was naked, embraced the serpent, which wrapped itself around her, enveloping her in its folds". The husband understood that, as a result of these embraces, the serpent's venom penetrated the body of his wife, who could only save her own life by transmitting it to others. He refused to sleep with her and she perished from the effect of the poison. The tribe threw the body of "the woman who loved a lake–serpent" into the stream where the monster lived. [23]

This story, known also among the Inuit of Labrador, illustrates the theme, well known in Europe, of the "*venomous maiden*". The story of the charming present – a splendid girl, nourished since childhood with the venom of a serpent – sent to King Alexander by an enemy king, has been recounted since the 12th century. Wilhelm Hertz has underlined that stories like these have their basis in archaic beliefs, related to the supposed noxiousness of menstrual blood, and consequently the dangers of the loss of virginity. These perils are universally attached to the presence of a serpent in the vagina or to *the visit of a mythic serpent, a lover of women, during their periods.* [24]

Our Indian legend furnished an important detail in specifying that the wife went into the forest. This signifies that she was having her menstrual period and had to isolate herself, far from encampments. Menstruation permitted a vision of the sea–serpent, as did puberty: this is confirmed by a Shawnee account of a young girl "eating alone" in the woods; a euphemism for her ritual isolation during a menstrual period. A Great Serpent appeared in the waters of the lake, which was "hot and boiling" in his vicinity. Her father called the great council: the council had a tent installed in the middle of the lake for the girl. When the serpent appeared, the girl went into the water and beat it several times with her under–garments. When the reptile's strength left him and the shaman killed him, his body was cut up into pieces, offered as amulets to each member of the tribe. [25]

The secret rapport existing between the female cycle and the apparition of the Lake–Serpent cannot be better expressed. Sometimes these secret loves are fertile, and, as among the Sauks, the woman gives birth, at the edge of a lake, to

Opposite: **The 'tree' used to bridge the abyss becomes a living being, a giant crocodile-like monster. Gustave Doré's engraving for E–L. L'Épine's** *La légende de Croquemitaine* **(1863).** [Fortean Picture Library]

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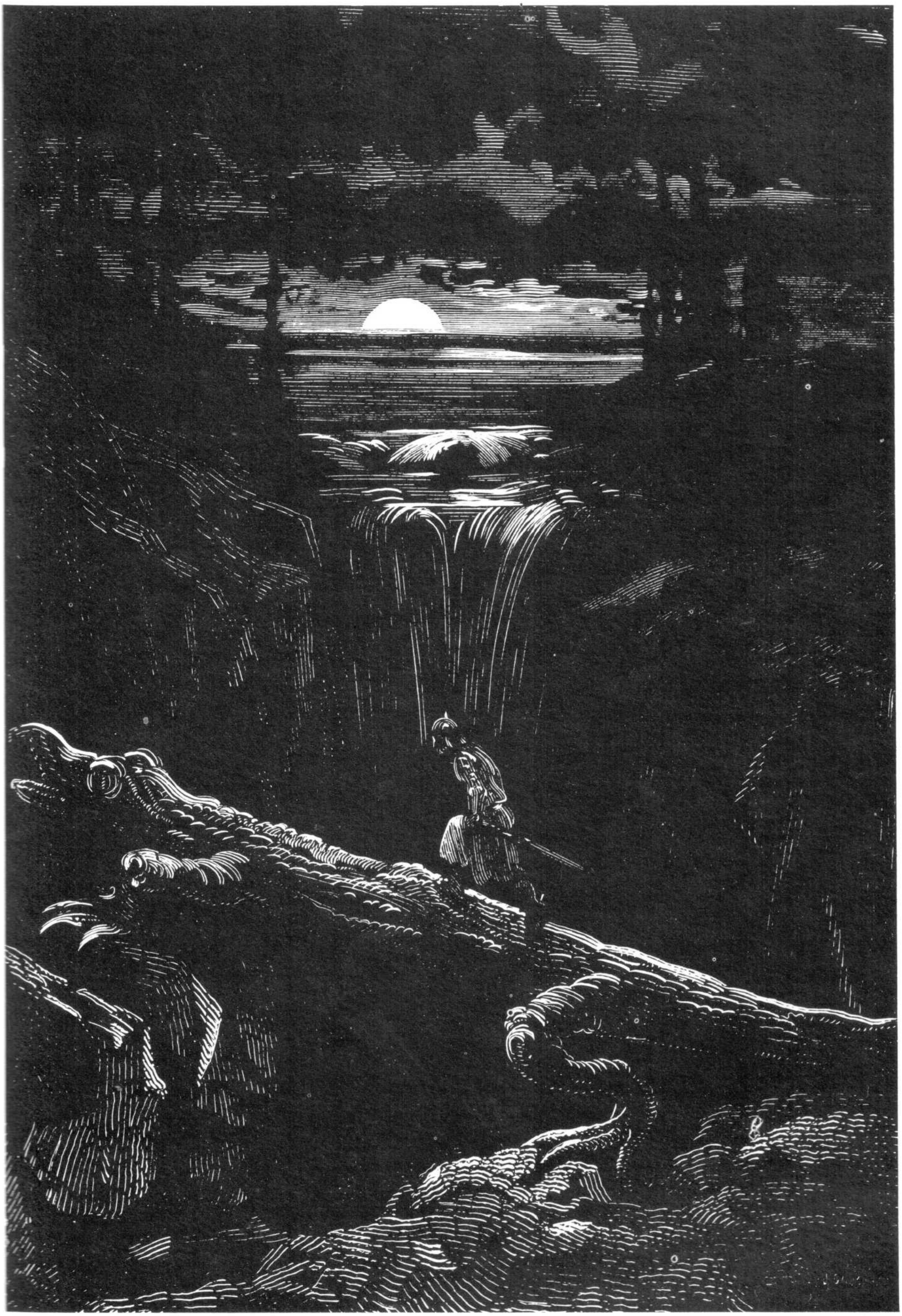
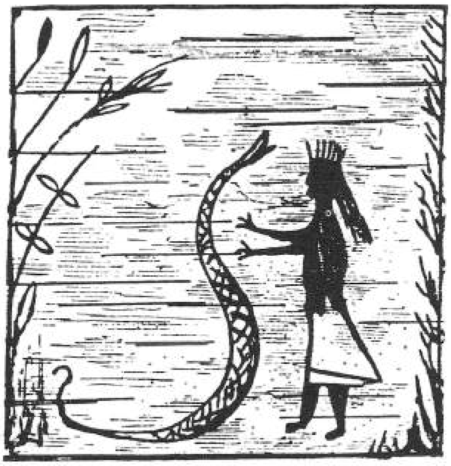
23 ■ C. Leland 1884.

24 ■ W.Hertz 1897.

25 ■ A.S. Gatschet, 'Water monsters of American aborigines,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 13, 1899.



Horned–Serpent eggs. [26] Here the wife was a stranger to the tribe, a Sioux. Another squaw of this group, a prisoner of the Piegans, disquieted her husband by her frequent solitary wanderings in the woods. Suspecting the existence of a lover, he forced the Sioux woman, Onwi–Menocha ("Moon woman"), to participate in a public confessional ritual, the "dance of the secret loves". Each woman performs a charade of mime and drawing, which the other women must decode to discover her secret admirer. Onwi–Menocha finally entered the circle. This is how she behaved: "She threw her coat off and stood completely naked. Her whole body was painted green. Nobody knew the significance of this masquerade. She began her dance which was supposed to reveal this secret admirer. She lay down and started to crawl on the grass. Sometimes she half rose and hissed, then she curved herself again towards the ground. The spectators, stupefied, watched. Suddenly one of them cried: '*The serpent! The serpent is her lover!*' The cry spread with dread and horror. '*Kill her! The serpent is her lover*!' However, Onwi–Menocha stood, gleaming, near the sacred stone, and hissed in their faces. She disappeared, but continued invisibly *to protect her husband's hunting*. She appeared to him in dreams and told him that she lived with the *Great Serpent of Hell*." [27]



The woman who loved a lake-serpent. An illustration to the Passamaquoddy tale, scraped on birch bark by Tomah Josephs, an Indian Governor in Maine, and informant of Leland's. From C.G. Leland, ***The Algonquin legends of New England*** **(1884).**

Among the American Indians, the Great Serpent is everywhere linked to the hunt and to fishing, both in the sea and in fresh water. Haietlik, of the Nootkas of Vancouver Island, was considered to be very precious, and fishermen offered, for part of his skin, 20 sea–otter skins. They believed that if they carried his flesh in their canoe, they were sure of killing a whale. [28]

The Great Lynx had the stature of a Master–of–Fishes in the Great Lakes. Father Allouez, who fought the belief, reported: "They make good sacrifices for sturgeon fishing". In 1672 this Jesuit confirmed that fishing tribes around Puans Bay held the same belief: "*Missipissy* is like their Neptune; they offer banquets to this water god in order to obtain sturgeons." [29]

At the end of the last century, explorers for the Canadian government found the water god in Lake Winnipeg under the name of *Miskena*. "At the end of a spit of land, the lake descends to its greatest depth. It is here that the Indians have established their winter camp, as there are many sturgeons in the depths. According to the beliefs of the poor natives who fish there in the winter, it is during this period of the year, in the deepest part of the lake, that the sturgeon hides and keeps counsel with Miskena, the Chief of the Fishes, in the southern part of Lake Winnipeg." [30]

Now, Lake Winnipeg communicates with the Saskatchewan River, where observations of a monster have been registered [31], as well as in the Lake of the Woods, where the mysterious pictograph of a Serpent-Sturgeon is reminiscent of Miskena. The largest *maskinongés*, which are said never to leave the bottom, and about which we've heard at the lake of the same name, share some fabulous traits with this king of Lake Winnipeg.

Insofar as he is Master of the wind and of the waters, the serpent can bring about tempests and swells. For the

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26 ■ Two novelists - Jeff Danziger (*The Champlain Monster*, Vermont, 1981) and Corinne Normand-Hudon (*Pohénégamook*, Sainte-Foy, 1981) – present lake monsters as *egg-laying*.

Sometime before 1897, in Campiglio in the Tyrol, a dragon's egg was on display. See: A. Heyl 1897.

27 ■ H.R. Rieder 1952.

28 ■ C.F. Newcombe, 'Petroglyphs in British Columbia,' in *Victoria Times* 10 September 1907.

29 ■ Jesuits 1666–1667.
See also: Jesuits 1673.

30 ■ H.Y. Hind 1859.

31 ■ R.S. Lambert 1955.

Chickasaws of the Mississippi, he unleashes them with the aim of travelling from one river to another on turbulent flood. [32] As in Europe, he can change his form, and under human appearance he can seduce and abduct women. A mythical landscape surrounds the places he haunts; among the Coeur–d'Alénes of British Columbia there is a lake called *Hînqûmemen*, the *"Engulfer"*. The Indians avoid it with terror; whoever draws water there is pursued by the lake, which brings him back and drowns him. [33]

The monster has underground passages leading from one expanse of water to another – as we have learned at Lakes Pohénégamook and Témiscouata – where he can bring his victims. According to the Coeur–d'Alénes, the "Mysteries" (ie. the monsters) of certain lakes use subterranean corridors leading to streams on the summits of their mountains. Four sisters, who were bathing, once saw what they took to be an enormous fish in a deep basin of the Saint–Joe River. They swam to this place and then disappeared. According to their companions, the thing that they had glimpsed was in fact "the tongue of the Mystery of the waters". Some time later the scalps of the vanished women were found high in the mountain, on the shores of a little lake, proving a communication between the two bodies of water. [34] The curious story of an Indian family swamped by Naitaka, and whose canoe was discovered, it is said, many years later perched on a mountain, far from Lake Okanagan, must be attributed to a similar tradition. [35]

The door to the underground kingdom of the serpents is guarded by pictographs. These paintings are not simple naturalistic representations, but rather a sort of key for entering into communication with them, if it is so desired. [36] The images are active, lively and magical. At certain times, from certain angles, and in certain seasons, observation permits the viewer to see these drawings move. Mirages, well known to the travellers of the Great Lakes, can also play their role. [37] In any case, these serpents of watery yellow, like their representations, are the legitimate guardians of the threshold of lakes and rapids.

THE MONSTER
IS 'MYSTERY'
OF LANDSCAPES
ANIMAL FORM.

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32 ■ J.R. Swanton, *Social and religious beliefs of the Chickasaw Indians*, Bureau of American Ethnology. Report 44, 1926, 7.

33 ■ J. Teit, *The Salishan tribes of the Western Plateaus*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 47, 1927.

34 ■ *ibidem*.

35 ■ R.S. Lambert 1955.

36 ■ Dewdney records, of the rocks inhabited by *Maymaygwayshi*, that "specially gifted Ojibwa shamans had the power to enter the rock and exchange tobacco for an extremely potent 'rock medicine'." (Dewdney & Kidd 1967 [1962], p14.)

37 ■ H.R. Schoolcraft 1851.

CHAPTER 4

THE WATER–HORSE OF NEW FRANCE

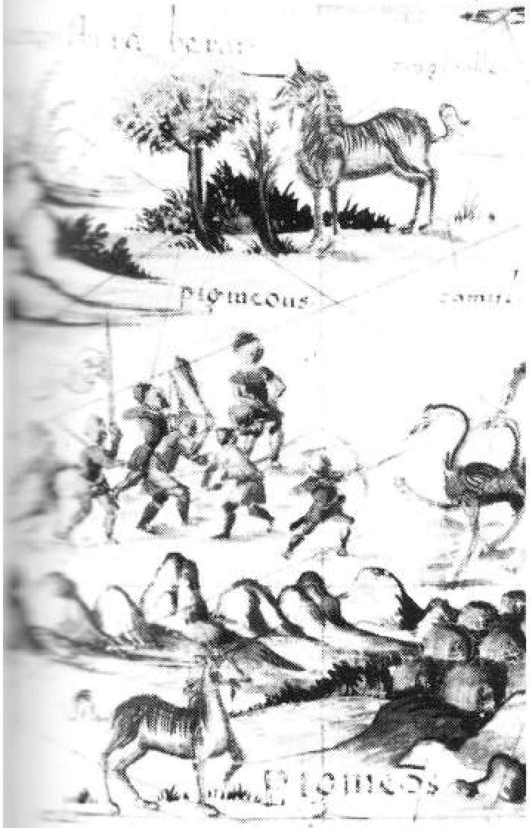
4.1

THE PYGMIES AND THE UNICORN

> *"... a rich harvest of stories about the monsters of the coast waters, the principal rivers, and the lakes of Canada. The Indians had already populated the fresh waters with different giants and mythical serpents, well before the arrival of the white man. The settlers, coming from Scandinavia, from Iceland, and from Germany, had no difficulty in identifying these monsters with their 'water-horses' and other evil spirits of their native folklore, which they remembered. Last, but not least, the ships' captains who developed the fisheries of the east and west coasts brought with them their own tradition of giant squids and sea-serpents and other monsters of the ocean."*
>
> R.S. Lambert, *Investigating the Supernatural: The Weird in Canadian Folklore.*

The first monsters which the founders of New France took to account were the water monsters, haunting the islands and the running waters. There is nothing surprising in this, as the penetration of the country was made by the great waterways, first and foremost the Saint-Lawrence. This type of exploration led the whites to become interested in any information with which the Indians could furnish them about the difficulties of river travel. As Joseph McGuire has shown, the *rumours* peddled by the tribes, first to the forts and then to the fur traders, preceded and, in some ways, oriented the discoverers. [1]

A portion of Pierre Descellier's Planisphere (1550), showing part of New France (which he called Canada) with the unicorns and pygmies believed to inhabit the interior. [British Museum ©]



We can go further: by means of these rumours, the mental universe of the indigenous people was revealed to the settlers, a universe which they accepted or refused, according to its points of agreement or of friction with their own. Long before disembarking, the Europeans had done a great deal of imagining about what they would find. The first steps were still close to their conceptions. The French were convinced they would discover, somewhere in the forests of the New World, the fabulous unicorn. The map of New France designed by Descellier in 1550 depicts pygmies as well as the unicorn.

This strange horned horse must have had a hard life, as the German author Olfert Dapper continued to locate the unicorn, even in 1673, "within the boundaries of Canada". [2] As for the pygmies, they came from a mixture of European and Indian beliefs. In the 1530s Jacques Cartier expected to discover these familiar dwarfs from the maps that he used. [3] The tribes have a whole cycle of legends about dwarfs; the *Migamawesus* of the Gaspé mountains, or the little people of the Micmacs, for example. Whether from sincerity or as a tactic, they would speak to the foreigners about the country of little men, and perhaps the Whites would go to see for themselves and take their overly large boats with them...

To the extent that colonisation progressed, the rumours peddled by the Indians were more and more discouraging; enormous waterfalls, engulfing monsters and so on. From commercial motives also, especially if a tribe wanted to keep the monopoly of commerce with the Europeans, its enemies, farther along the river, were described as caricatures of humanity. Thus the Souriquois (Micmacs) confided to one of Champlain's captains – the Breton Prévert – that their adversaries, the Armouchiquois of Acadia, were "wild and monstrous men". When they are seated on their heels, "their knees pass more than a half-foot above their heads, a strange thing which seems unnatural". [4] Inevitably, the advance of colonisation destroyed this fable, and Marc Lescarbot, six years later, enjoyed noting that the supposed *wild men* "are men as beautiful as we are". [5]

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[1] ■ J. MacGuire, 'Ethnology in the Jesuit Relations,' in *American Anthropologist*, vol 3, 1901.

[2] ■ O. Dapper 1673. See also: O. Shepard 1930.

[3] ■ Biggar 1924.

These monstrous races of men, heirs to medieval notions, are "pushed back to the edges" of the newly discovered country. [6] However, other beliefs are hardier, defying such sceptics as Lescarbot. *The spirits of waters and of woods, therefore, are as much a part of the European mental universe as of the Indian*: their fusion is effected by the sincerity of terror. The French were happy to replace the evil spirits of the natives with their own devils; but the credibility remained the same. The haunted islands of the Saint-Lawrence, avoided by the bark boats, would be avoided likewise by the navigators of New France. What became the *"Poincte-aux-Vaches"*, at the mouth of the Saguenay, was named, from the time of Champlain, the "Point-of-all-the-Devils". [7]

Captain Prévert, whom we saw bring faith to the "savages" of the Souriquois, had another misadventure with a mythic Indian personage. This is how Champlain recorded it: "In an island near the Baye des Chaleurs, a dreadful monster lived which the savages called *Gougou*, and they told me that it had the shape of a woman, but terrifying, and of such a size that, they told me, the end of the masts of our ship would come only to her waist, so large did they depict her, and that often it gorged itself on savages, which it put into a great pouch, when it could trap them, and then eat them; and those who had avoided the peril of this unhappy beast told us that its pouch was so big that it could put our entire boat in it. This monster made horrible noises inside of its island... Even the Sieur Prévert of Sainct-Malo [sic] told me that he had passed so close to the dwelling of this dreadful beast, while going to discover mines, that he and all of his vessels heard strange whistlings from the noise that she made..." [8]

It was not unnatural that Captain Prévert, as a man of his time, believed in giants; many of his contemporaries situated these monsters also in the New World. Doctor Simon Goulart wrote in 1620: "The West Indies are the site of many giants, as those who have written the histories attest". [9] In 1613, just ten years after Champlain's first expedition, it was thought that the bones of a thirteen-foot-high colossus, the famous King Theutobochus, had been exhumed in France; in they were identified by early paleontologists as the remains of a mastodon. [10] Brittany knew, notably, the *Hok-Braz*, which swallowed three-masted boats for its breakfast. [11]

The Micmacs succeeded in transmitting to the French the mythological figure of the *Gougou* – also *"Gugu"* or *"Gugwe"* – the giant cannibal with enormous hands and a hairy bear-like

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4 ■ *Relation de 1603*, in S. de Champlain 1870.

5 ■ M. Lescarbot 1611.
See also: Victor V. Tremblay, 'Le Saguenay de Lescarbot,' in *Saguenayensia*, vol 7, Nº 1, January-February 1965.

6 ■ F.M. Gagnon, 'Le thème médiéval de l'homme sauvage dans les representations des Indiens d'Amérique,' in Gagnon 1975 B.

7 ■ *"Poincte-de-tous-les-Diables"*. See: S. de Champlain 1870.

8 ■ S. de Champlain 1870.

9 ■ S. Goulart 1620.

10 ■ N. Habicot 1673.
The bones were discovered on 11 January 1613, near the castle of Chaumont (Dauphiné), in a region known locally as the *"Champ des Géants"*. They have since been reclassified as the remains of the elephant-like *Deinotherium*. Wendt, 1970, p32.

11 ■ P.Y. Sébillot 1968 A, vol 2.

face, similar to *Atcen* of the Montagnais, which the missionaries had heard of, an ogre which cut off the heads of sleeping men. [**12**] The Gougou became a tradition of the sailors of the Saint-Lawrence, and its island one for all boats to avoid. [**13**] These islands, as was indicated on the maps, established a mythic, syncretic geography in the newly discovered country. There is little doubt that the "Isles des Diables" near Labrador, which Thévet mentions in 1558 [**14**], are Belle Isle and Quirpon, where the sailors would only land with a crucifix in their hands. [**15**] The "Isle of Demons" of the territory of Newfoundland – known to posterity because of the sojourn of a female Robinson Crusoe – is another of these diabolical domains. [**16**]

For sailing folk, the the discovery of America was often the discovery of terror.

4.2

TRACKS AND WAKES OF THE MONSTERS

Often a strange 'foot print' would suffice to set anxiety in motion. It is a sort of emissary of this wilderness, which the Europeans groped to discover, and its vagueness fanned their anxiety. On one mysterious island, between Detroit and Montréal, "many Indians and French have come on shore and have never returned. When they would be some distance into the woods, those who had stayed with the canoes would hear screams; once fourteen men disappeared at a time, and another company keeping watch two days and two nights, a few steps from there, learned nothing of their departure. The Indians called it the *"Island of the Devil"*; they discovered well-trodden trails and tracks on the sandy beach, which could have been made by a large man or a bear; the French think that it is a dragon which killed the men". [**1**]

These prints of a man (or bear) of a great height lead one to think of the *Wendigo*, the wild man of the Indians, who is said to have left tracks a mixture of bear paws and split hooves. [**2**] David Thompson, crossing the gorge of the Athabasca River in the Rockies during the winter of 1811, also saw bizarre traces resembling those of a bear, but much larger, whose paws seemed to disappear. [**3**] For the Indians these tracks were those of a "young mammoth"; perhaps they wanted to designate a being similar to *No-Kos-Ma* of the Cree, a sort of mammoth-like black bear with an enormous snout. [**4**] The beast of the "Island of the Devil" was, according to the French, one of the dragons of their popular traditions, living half in the water; an avatar of the Tarasque, living "on the shores of the Rhone, next to a large rock in the woods". [**5**]

The French pitted themselves against the Indian water monsters in the person of Father Marquette, the Jesuit companion of Canadian explorer Louis Joliet, in his discovery of the Mississippi. [**6**] Marquette records that before their departure, the Menóminees warned them: "The great river is very dangerous when one does not know the difficult places; *it is full*

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12 ■ E.C. Parsons, 'Mic Mac folklore,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 38, 1925.

See also: F.G. Speck, 'Montagnais and Naskapi tales,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 38, 1925.

13 ■ C.M. Skinner 1899.

14 ■ A. Thévet 1558.

15 ■ C.M. Skinner 1889.

16 ■ A. Thévet 1558.

Marguerite de La Roque was marooned for nearly 2½ years, with her maid and lover, on Harrington Island, in1541, by her uncle, the sieur de Roberval, an explorer and contemporary of Cartier.

See also: P.A. de Gaspé, 'Une nuit chez les Sorciers,' in Anon 1863.

1 ■ J.R. Masterson, 'Traveller's tales of colonial natural history,' *Journal of American Folklore*, 1946.

2 ■ A. Gray 1970.

A note in the Niagara Falls (NY) *Evening Review* for 16 November 1950, records the fears of an Amerindian fishing and trapping community at Berens Lake in the far north-west of Ontario, concerning the attacks of a *"Windigo"*, which, they claim, is "tearing their fishing nets". A White fur-trader had "an artistically-minded Indian" draw a picture of the creature, which was "first seen several months ago", but instead of the expected "transformed human, or werewolf", the native artist drew a creature which "resembled an *alligator*." This Windigo is described as amphibious, coming onto the shores and rapidly slithering underwater again. (Credit: Dwight Whalen.)

3 ■ D. Thompson 1916.

4 ■ J.R. Swanton, *Religious beliefs and medical practices of the Cree Indians*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 42, 1925.

5 ■ L. Dumont 1951.

6 ■ J. Delanglez 1950.

of dreadful monsters which would devour people and canoes altogether; there is even a demon which one can hear from far away which blocks passage and which destroys those who dare to approach it." Later, he wrote: "On the river, we have encountered, from time to time, monstrous fish, one of which hit against our canoe so violently that I believed that it was an *enormous tree* which was going to break it into pieces. Another time we saw a monster on the water which had a *tiger's head*, a pointed nose like a wild cat, with a beard and with *its ears sticking straight up*; the head was grey and the neck all black; we didn't see it very clearly." [**7**] This aquatic feline has all the characteristics of a lynx: the grey winter skin and the ears which end in a tuft of hair. Had Marquette ever heard the stories of the Great Lynx? He had just crossed the Great Lakes, and might have heard of legendary encounters.

Father Marquette's next step led him to one of the great whirlpools in the river, a retreat of the monsters: "We passed by a place feared by the savages because they assumed that there was a *'Manitou'*, that is to say *a demon, which devoured passers-by*; it is with this that the savages, who wanted to turn us back from our enterprise, threatened us. Here is the demon. It's a small hollow among rocks, 20 feet high, where all of the current of the river disgorges, and was turned back against the flow, and stopped by the nearby island and forced to pass via a small canal; this doesn't happen without a furious combat, in which all of the waters turn one on the other with a great thundering, which frightens the savages, who fear everything." [**8**]

Master of the art of rationalising the demons of others, Father Marquette didn't have time to see the monster of the rapids. Nor was he aware that he and Joliet had travelled past the artificial hillocks built by the mysterious Adena culture, of which the most famous is also the largest Serpent effigy in the world, the *Great Serpent Mound* of Ohio. [**9**]

Although these monsters were absent from the cascades, the Jesuit was able, at least, to see painted images on the cliffs and contributed, involuntarily, to the creation of a fantastic, completely incongruous beast: "As we approached the rocks, frightfully high and wide, we saw on one of them paintings of two monsters, which frightened us at first, and *on which even the hardiest savages did not dare to rest their eyes for very long*; they're as big as deer, with a fearful expression, red eyes, a beard like a tiger's, the face was something like a man's, the body covered with scales and the tail, longer than the body, passing above the head and returning between the legs, it ends in a poisonous barb. Green, red and black are the three colours of which it is composed. As we came upon these monsters we were floating peacefully on beautiful clear and tranquil water, then we heard the sound of a rapid into which we were about to fall. I've never seen anything more frightful, a great number of enormous trees, and branches, little floating isles, came from the mouth of the Pekitanoui River with as much vigour as one could expose oneself to in crossing it, without great danger." [**10**]

Marquette didn't make the connection between the hieroglyphs and the terrible falls, but for us these fish-men were

Opposite, sideways: **The Great Serpent Mound of Adams County, in southern Ohio, photographed from the air by Dr Georg Gerster.** [© John Hillelson Agency.]

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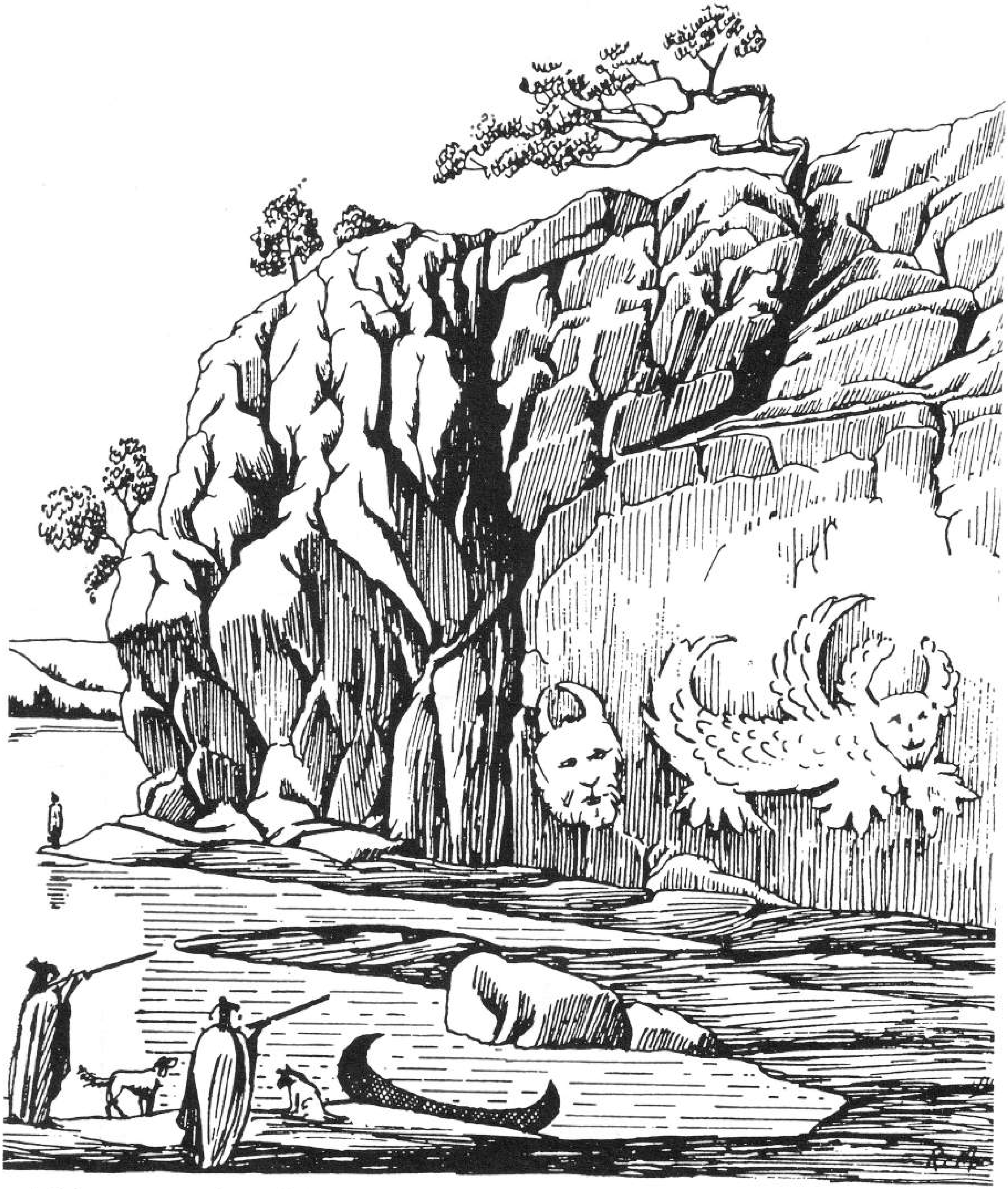
7 ■ R.J. Marquette 1855.

8 ■ *ibidem*.

9 ■ R. Silverberg 1970.
Dean Snow thinks that the building of the "dragon's mound" was "possibly inspired by the passing of a comet", which would link, once again, serpents and luminous phenomena. See: Snow 1977.

10 ■ R.J. Marquette 1855.



An impression of the pictographs, said to represent the Piasa, painted onto a bluff overlooking the Missouri River, south of Alton, Illinois. From H. Lewis, *The valley of the Mississippi illustrated* **(1854). See also, caption on next page.**

certainly representations of divinities residing in the whirlpool, which is confirmed by the detail that "even the most hardy savages did not dare to rest their eyes on it for a long time", fearing, as did their brothers of Nicola Lake, the risk of shipwreck due to the vengeance of the water demon.

It had been thought that the beings in the mural might be identified with the spirits of the indigenous folklore, with goat's heads. [11] Nevertheless, later travellers, who avidly sought Marquette's monsters on the Mississippi, were only able to distinguish very deteriorated traces. This did not prevent

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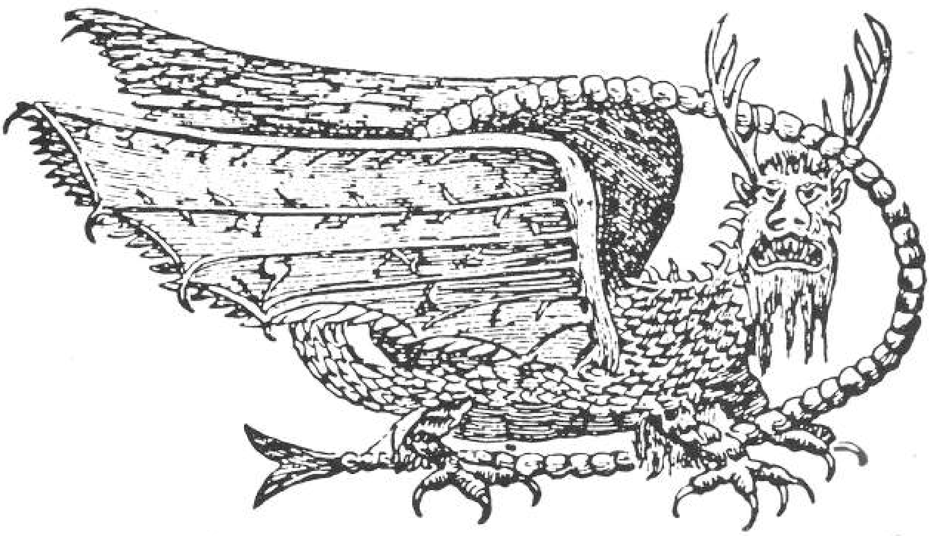
[11] G. Benwell and A. Waugh 1961.



Indian travellers, from a variety of tribes, would not pass the Piasa image at Alton without pulling up on the facing shore and firing their arrows at it, as Marquette records. Whether they did this out of fear or as an offering the early chroniclers could not agree.

As the rifle replaced the bow the old image was soon erased by bullets and more fanciful reconstructions were attempted (but no longer on the original site) by local artists and municipal historians. This version – from P.A. Armstrong, *The Piasa: or the Devil among the Indians* **(1887) – has been widely promoted as the 'original' design.** [Fortean Picture Library]

romancers and journalists from providing dithyrambic descriptions, supplying colours from their own imaginations for the worn-out colours of the pictographs, as well as transforming a spirit of the river into a winged reptile "with the body and the paws of an alligator, the wings of an eagle, the horns of an elk and the ears of a fox, a human face, mouth, teeth and the moustache of a tiger, tail of a serpent or of a fish."

This winged demon – the *Piasa* – or rather the few sufficiently undefinable beasts which stem from the *thunderbird,* were the object of a whole cycle of false Indian legends, feverishly concocted by opportunistic Longfellows. We can see in these fabricated creatures – like those of Doctor Moreau – the results of an entire zoo cut into pieces and hastily reassembled. The monster attacked an army of Miamis and decimated them in full march; it took their chief in its powerful embrace. The lairs of the beast are described as being filled with skeletons. These ingredients were destined to satisfy a public, starved for black romanticism, with an Indian sauce. The author P.A. Armstrong assembled a collection of these fables in 1887. It was barely one year after Geronimo and his Apaches had launched their last assaults. The Indian was conquered and with him his culture.

Armstrong denies that the Indians could have enough mastery of anatomical design to have executed the portrait of the two monsters. According to Armstrong, the painters of Piasa "seemed to have been familiar with the descriptions of the holy scriptures" concerning the seven-headed beast of the Apocalypse. He is a man of his time; the author wanted to mix the Bible and paleontology. The Piasa is, for him, a prehistoric animal, the *rhamphorynchid,* a reptile with bat's wings and the mouth of a crocodile, known to the Indians' ancestors. [12] We remain baffled before this creature of the century of positivism, whose godfathers were St. John and Charles Cuvier.

PALEONTOLOGY
IN LIEU WITH CHRISTIAN
ESCHATOLOGY OF VICTORIAN
SCIENCE IS AFFIRMED BY THE
INDIGENOUS BELIEF
AS SUPPLEMENT

[SIMILAR TO MEMOIRS BY HAWKINS]

It is true that Armstrong is only one among many other practitioners of a literary genre who attribute to an "advanced" civilisation (ie. neo-European) the building of all of these ancient monuments of the Mississippi valley, particularly the famous hillocks. In 1839, Cornelius Mathew offered his *Behemoth: A legend of the Mound Builders,* in which he depicted another

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12 ■ P.A. Armstrong 1887.

another prehistoric colossus, the mammoth, destroying the cities of the 'Mound Builder' civilisation, and of course his monster bore the name of the giant beast of the Bible, 'Behemoth'. The moral of this story: the Amerindian monster, to its surprise, has been provided with theatrical accessories, completely useless in his wet kingdom: membrane-thin wings, rapacious claws, and moustache *á la* Groucho Marx!

4.3

THE HUNT FOR NEPTUNE

Tradition can sometimes be wrong. Until recently, an album of antique drawings, published in 1930 by its editor Marc de Villiers, had been widely attributed to an attourney at the office of the Provost of Québec, Charles Bécard de Grandville (1675–1703). Called the *'Codex Canadiensis'* or the *Rarities of the Indies*, this collection of manuscript illustrations offers us a rich corpus of North American fauna from early colonial times. [**1**]

However, Anne Marie Sioui has since compared this *Codex* with a manuscript preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris – the *Natural history of the West Indies* by a Jesuit, Father Louis Nicolas – and has established correspondences between the two treatises. [**2**] Fate separated the two manuscripts: the *Codex* ending up at the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, at Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the *Natural history* at the Bibliothèque Nationale. I, too, have compared the two and I am fully satisfied that they are both by Nicolas and intended to complement one another.

Louis Nicolas was born in the Languedoc province of France in 1634 and went as a missionary to New France in 1663. He returned to France in 1675 and began work on his *Natural history*. [**3**] His religious activities took place during the last stage of the great Jesuit missions (1660–1675), and concentrated on the tribes of the Algonkian family around the Great Lakes. [**4**] As a result of his contacts with the Amerindian, Nicolas wrote, in 1672–1674, an *Algonkian grammar*, which has also remained in manuscript. In its introduction, Nicolas states that he had to learn "the most barbaric language" in order to talk to "nations without human nature", and he concluded: "I made myself a child among children. I wandered with savages through the wilderness." [**5**]

As a preliminary to our study of the *Natural history*, this statement is useful to us. Nicolas is not a modern ethnologist, attempting to get as close as he can to another culture. Right from the start, the French Jesuit is convinced of the superiority of his way of life. He, the Christian, will bring Truth to the heathen, and although he adapts to their ways he remains aware of his status as a subject of the Sun King, a son of a polished country. He sees himself in the role of a messenger of maturity and order to a world of childish barbarity.

When we open his *Natural history* we find signs of this

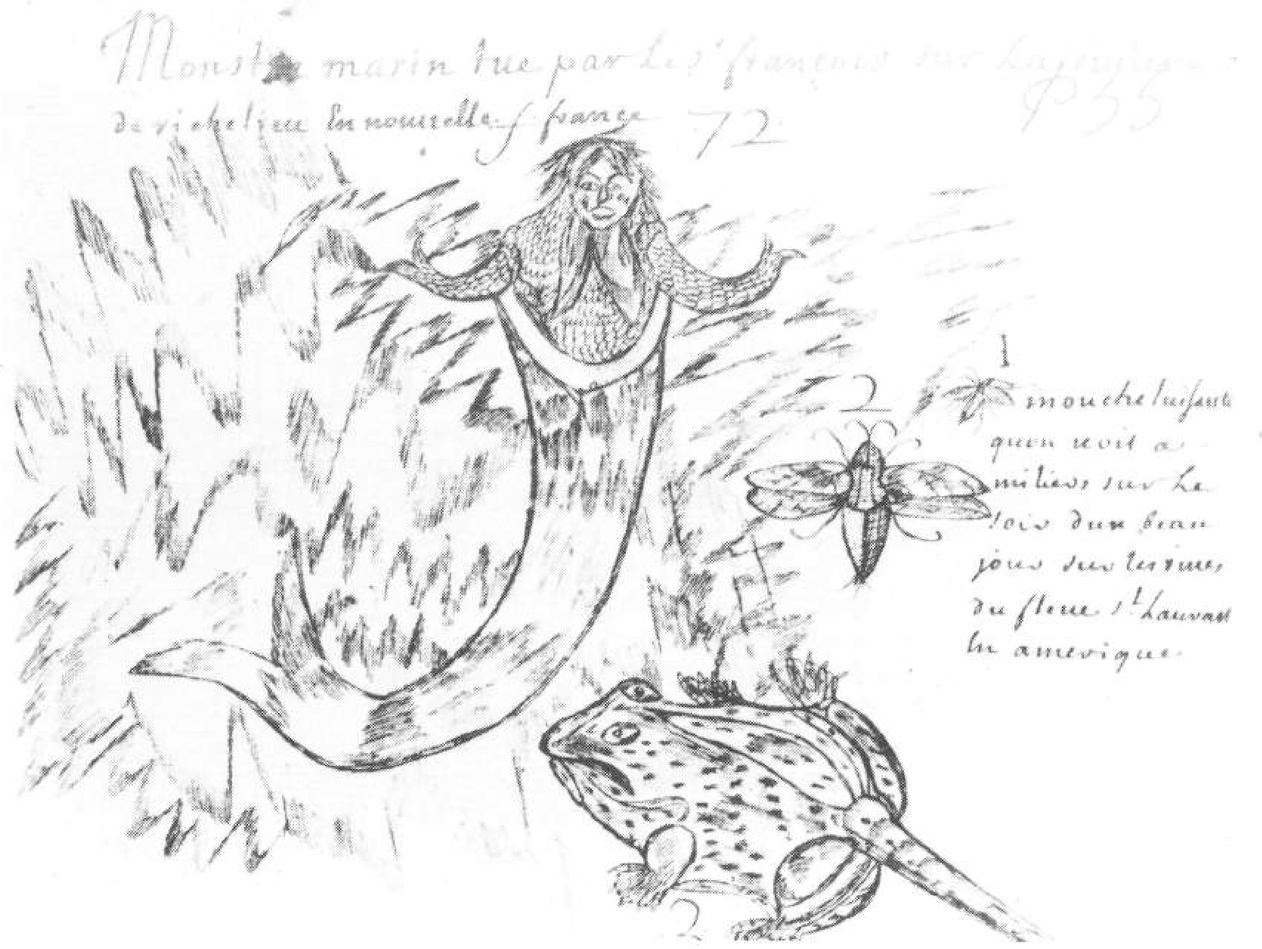
1 ■ *Les raretés des Indes* ('Codex Canadiensis'), 1930 – wrongly attributed to Charles Bécard.

2 ■ Anne Marie Sioui, 'Qui est l'auteur du Codex Canadiensis?' in *Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec*, vol 8, N° 4, 1979, pp271–279.

3 ■ C. Sommervogel 1960, p1709.
See also: Anne Marie Sioui, 'Qui est l'auteur du Codex Canadiensis?' in *Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec*, vol 8, N° 4, 1979, pp271–279.

4 ■ L. Groulx 1960, vol 1, pp105–109.

5 ■ L. Nicolas 1672, folio 4.


Monstre marin tue par les françois sur La riviere de richelieu En nouvelle france 72
P55
1 mouche luisante quon voit a milliers sur le soir dun beau jour sur les rives du fleuve St Laurant En amerique
2
2

Louis Nicolas' illustration of the merman of the Richlieu River; from the *Natural history...* **(c1675).** [© Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris]

dualistic approach. In studying North American Nature Father Nicolas discovers in it the same disorder he detected in the society of the "savages": the land and the beasts are all extreme. He writes, in the *Codex*, that "the Gulf of the Saint-Lawrence is larger than the entire Mediterranean"; and in the *Natural history* he notes that rattlesnakes can reach "18 to 20 feet in length", and a kind of reptile lazes on the shore "as big and as long as a wooden beam." [**6**] The element of water hides gargantuan monsters. Full of awe and wonder, Father Nicolas reports the tremendous fights of the huge whales in the Gulf, the blows of their tails sounding like a warship's broadsides. [**7**]

After the terrors come the marvels of the deep: on folio 35 of the *Codex Canadiensis*, the Jesuit has sketched a strange creature with a roundish head, long hair and a goatee. Its scale-covered body ends in a curved fishtail; it waves its forked fins and fixes us with a slightly menacing air. The drawing represents "a sea-monster killed by the French on the Richelieu River in New France."

The iconography of the creature corresponds to that of a particular type of merman, the Old Man of the Sea. It is a borrowing from the figures of bearded tritons and the Neptunes on contemporary charts. Such images were imported into colonial Canada, as demonstrated by Marc Lescarbot's play, *Theatre de Neptune*, presented at Port Royal in Acadia, (Nova Scotia) in 1606. On this first North American stage, the white-bearded and long-haired Master of the Ocean enters in a skiff drawn by six native canoes. French soldiers of the garrison were

6 ■ L. Nicolas, *Histoire naturelle...* c.1675, folios 60–61.

On folio 168, Nicolas tells the story of a "twenty-foot-long" snake, killed near Clamecy, France, in about 1672. This reptile seized cows by their muzzles, and devoured them in a nearby dale.

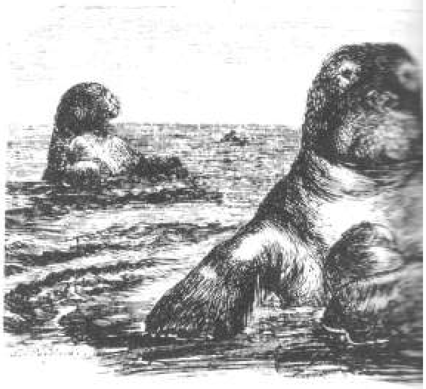
7 ■ L. Nicolas, *Histoire naturelle...* c.1675, folio 190.

For Louis Nicolas, the "armoured fish" or gar-pike – Champlain's Chaousarou [see App;x 2] could reach 10, even 12 feet in length, "and would be as feared as a crocodile if it had four feet." (*Histoire naturelle...* folio 184.)

THE HYPERBOLE AND SUPERFLUITY OF THE NEW WORLD
— 'THE WITNESS AND THE OTHER WORLD' BY MARY E. CAMPBELL

costumed as fishes or Amerindians. [8]

Forms similar to this imaginary one were allegedly seen, and described with realism and exactitude. For example, three Frenchmen and three Blacks from Martinique claimed to have seen, in 1671, a merman with "a large and plain face, an enormous snub nose, black hair tinged with grey which hung to his shoulders, and a long beard of seven or eight inches." [9] And, around 1698, according to Reverend John Brand, "several gentlemen" saw, off the Orkneys, "something with its head above the water, which as they could discern, had the face of an old man with a long beard hanging down." [10]



The dugong – the Indian Ocean relative of the manatee – in the familiar pose of mermaid reports: from Sir E. Tennant's *Natural history of Ceylon* **(1861).** [Fortean Picture Library]

Nicolas' "sea-monster" of the Richelieu River clearly belongs to this type. Some creature shot in the river had been described as though it was an elderly fish-man from the sea-lore of the period. In a treatise dedicated to the local fauna of Canada, the Jesuit has inserted not just an imaginary being, but one which is also the product of the European mind.

Nor was the story of the triton of the Richelieu forgotten in the 18th century, as evidenced by an entry in the 'diary' of Father Charlevoix, begun in 1721: "I don't know what credence one should give to what I saw in a manuscript account of an old missionary who claimed to have seen a sea-man in the Rivière de Sorel, three leagues below Chambly." [11] Charlevoix's "Sorel River" is an old name for the Richelieu, and Chambly was a French fort built to protect the city of Montreal against Iroquois raids. The "old missionary" is very likely Father Nicolas. Did he see the merman's remains for himself? Nothing in the terse commentary in the *Codex* allows us to suppose that he did.

The unicorn had already become acclimatized to the New World. [12] Then the classical merman of old travellers' maps fell under the muskets of nervous soldiers. The Canada of Father Nicolas was then a frontier of Knowledge, where Western man might still dream of actually finding the monsters of tradition. Reports of the killing of monsters are important because they seem to encourage such hopes. Louis Nicolas' drawing of the Richelieu fish-man is clearly intended as an *exhibit*; he has taken some pains not to represent some vague description of a faraway rumour, but to render an extraordinary creature frozen by death, that is to say available for a stable scientific description. His naive pen and ink sketch is the equivalent, today, of a blurred and dubious photograph of a stranded wonder of the deep or of an Amazonian ape-man. The thinking behind it remains the same: a carcass is the first step towards tangibility, and a drawing of it, therefore, is a half-step.

THE ROLE OF VISUAL REPRESENTATION IN SOLIDIFYING A SCIENTIFIC OBJECT

However, Nicolas has not offered us a precise portrait of the Richelieu animal – perhaps a pinniped [13] – but a legendary representation of it. All his efforts to reach a naturalistic description of Nature have, in this case, only contributed to the survival and strengthening of a myth. Thanks largely to Nicolas, the bearded merman had become a subspecies of the Atlantic one; a *Trito barbatus canadiensis* which could be killed and stuffed, or perhaps caught and kept in a great tank at Versailles where His Majesty could toss it raw fish.

THE MONSTERS INAUGURATION INTO NATURALISM REQUIRES ITS RENDERING AS CORPSE – 'DE-MONSTRATION'

[TANUKI KILLED BY TRAIN – FOSTER]

The material annexation of North America was reflected

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8 ■ V.R. Beaudry 1968.

9 ■ B. de Maillet 1748.

10 ■ J. Brand 1883 [1701], p171.

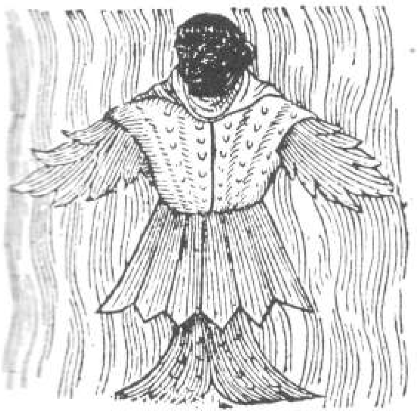
11 ■ Charlevoix 1744.

12 ■ See Chapter 4, Section 1.

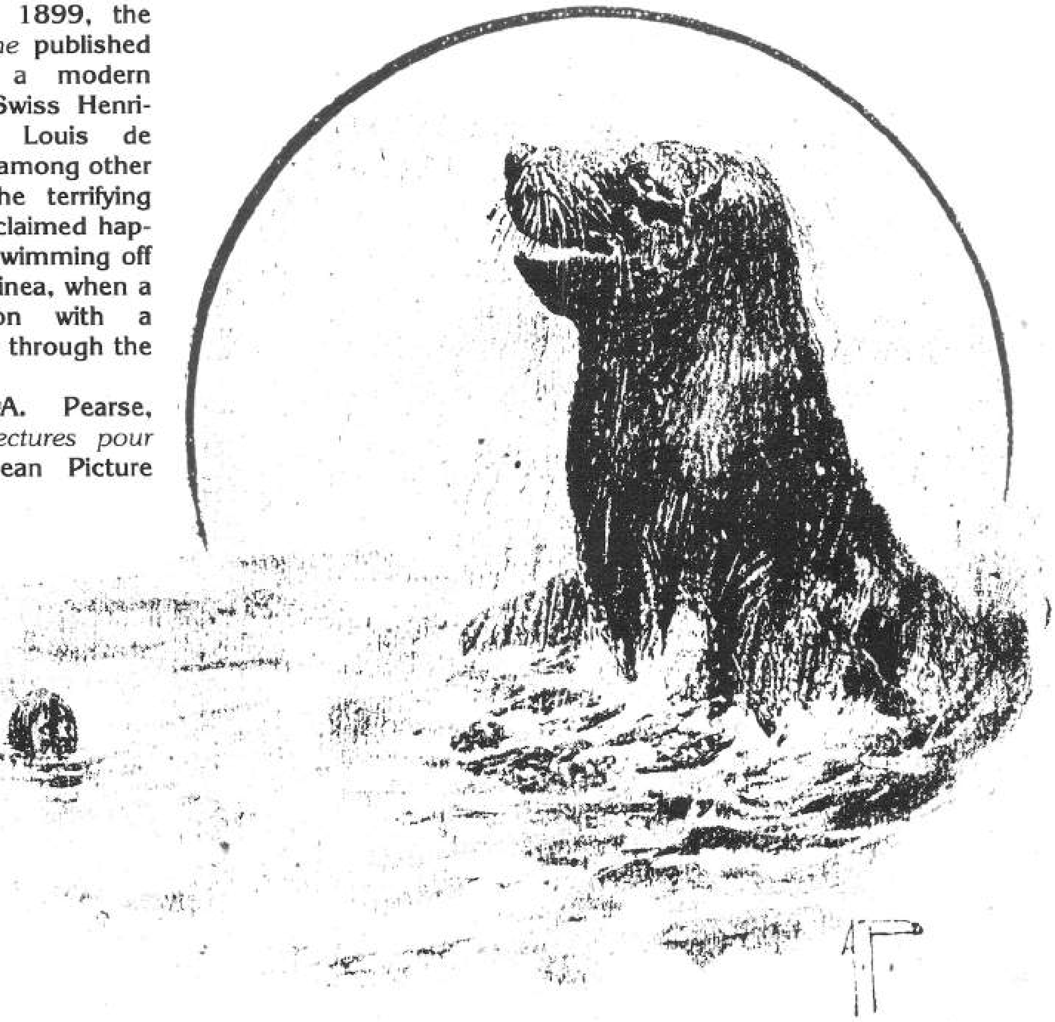
13 ■ A group of mammals which includes seals, sea-lions and walruses.

in its accession in the realm of imagination. If classical sea-gods can be shot, Amerindian ones risk the same fate. In 1782, Venant Saint-Germain, a merchant from Repentigny, near Montreal, crossing Lake Superior in the area of Pie Island at dusk, saw what he thought was a "child" rise out of the water with one arm extended. It had a little nose, well-formed ears and sparkling eyes. Its brownish complexion and "woolly hair" reminded him of "a young negro". Venant watched the strange little being for approximately three or four minutes. When he raised his gun, one of his companions, an old Amerindian woman, clung to his clothes, pleading with him not to shoot at "the God of the waters and the lakes". The merchant had to submit to her angry protests and the tiny form sank back slowly into the water. The native woman predicted that punishment would come in the form of a storm, which duly manifested later that evening when a violent gale lashed the surface of Lake Superior for three hours. [14]

We seem to be dealing with three levels here: initially, there is the question of the real identity of the little creature; then problems of the two interpretations of it, as a merboy by the White, and as a god of the lake by the Amerindian woman. The creature may have been a seal. An observation cited by Henry Lee may help: he was once on a yacht off the Hook of Holland when one of his companions, in broad daylight, mistook a seal – in the arms-raised pose of classical merfolk – for a boy, whom, she supposed, had swam from the coast on a begging expedi-



A 'Negro Fish', from Conrad Lycosthenes, *Prodigiorum...* **(1557).** [Fortean Picture Library]



Between 1896 and 1899, the *Wide World Magazine* **published the tall tales of a modern Munchhausen, the Swiss Henri-Louis Grin (alias Louis de Rougemont), which, among other marvels, included the terrifying moment the author claimed happened to him while swimming off the coast of New Guinea, when a 20-foot-long sea-lion with a "flowing** *mane*" **burst through the surface close to him.**

Drawing by A. Pearse, reproduced from *Lectures pour tous* **(1899).** **[Fortean Picture Library]**

[14] *Canadian Magazine* May 1824. See also: R.S. Lambert 1955.

tion. This significant conclusion is without doubt due to the extended hand-like fore-flippers giving the impression of a begging gesture. [15]

Venant's Saint-Germain little merboy was perceived in the poor but eminently mythogenic conditions of twilight, in which shadows can model a flipper into an extended 'arm', change the grey colour of a seal into "brownish hue", and metamorphose a sparse and wet fur seen from a distance into "woolly hair". But I suggest that the transformation of the bizarre creature into a negro merboy may have proceeded from a *later* elaboration. Venant saw the 'fish-boy' in 1781 but did not report it until 1812, when he made a sworn deposition before the judges of the Court of the King's Bench in Montreal. This judicial testimony demonstrates the sincerity of his statement, but cannot be understood as validation of his interpretation of it, because, as in the case of Captain von Ferry [16], too much time had elapsed between incident and statement – in Venant's case nearly 30 years – for us to accept his account at face value.

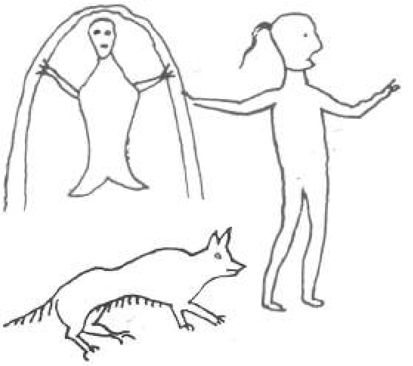
Von Ferry and Venant Saint-Germain, like Father Nicolas, considered sea-monsters to be part of the secular world-view. The Jesuit placed the Old Man of the Sea among the fauna of the New France; Venant tried the same thing through the Montreal court. His negro sea-boy was not an isolated sighting, but conforms to a *type*, like the bearded triton. In 1814 – two years after Venant's deposition – two Scottish fishermen claimed to have seen a negroid merman near Portgordon, on the Banff coast. [17]

"CONFORMS TO A TYPE"
HARRIET RITVO, M.D. FOSTER:
'THE CLASSIFICATORY IMAGINATION'

The merchant from Repentigny had projected onto the unidentified animal in Lake Superior details belonging to sea folklore; for him, the merfolk were to be classed as game which can be shot, like the fur animals he was trading. In sharp contrast to this European world-view was that of the Amerindian woman for whom the tiny creature was a supernatural being, the powerful master of the lake, a water-god. Even today, the Ojibwa of Lake Superior believed in the *Maymaygwayshi*, merfolk with children's bodies and hairy faces. Such water-pygmies are believe to produce their own rock paintings, raising their arms out of the water to leave red hand-prints on the rocks. Some pictographs of figures with raised arms have been interpreted as representations of the *Maymaygwayshi*. [18] So Venant's fish-boy is not that far removed from such fabulous beings; both in size, form and gesture (arm raised) it corresponds to the legendary *Maymaygwayshi*.

We need not conclude that Venant Saint-Germain believed he saw a *Maymaygwayshi*; it seems more likely that the unidentified – perhaps seal-like – animal produced in the Canadian trader and the Amerindian woman two separate identifications, each corresponding to a prevailing collective belief. Although Venant did not shoot the water-child, he succeeded in giving to the episode the coherency which appeals to modern readers, the status of a sworn affidavit. The tale of the monster of the Richelieu River was included in a 'Natural history', the adventure of the lake-child in a legal statement; the former under the protection of the State and the latter by goddess Nature. Yet both are made from the stuff of dreams.

THE TEXTUAL BIAS OF WESTERN THOUGHT
— PER DERRIDA, LATOUR



A pictograph of a fish-tailed 'mermaid', recorded by H.R. Schoolcraft, ***The American Indians*** **(1851 A). Selwyn Dewdney records the site as "unlocated" (Dewdney & Kidd 1967 [1962]).** [Fortean Picture Library]

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[15] ■ As quoted in R. Carrington 1957, p19.

[16] ■ See Introduction, p15ff.

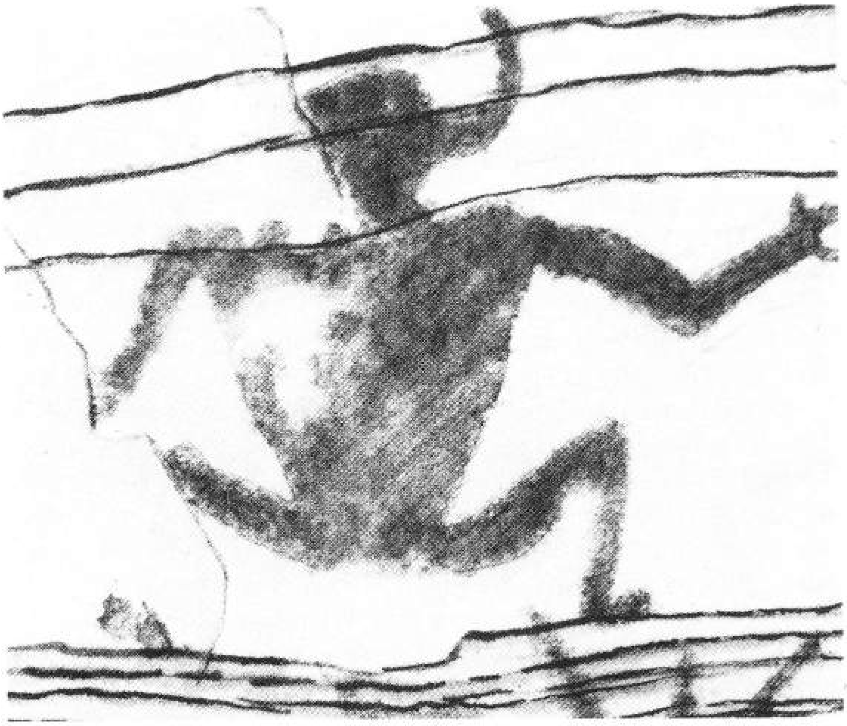
[17] ■ R.M. Robertson 1961, p155. The merman had "a swarthy face, short greenish-grey *curly* hair ... a flat nose and a large mouth... "

In about 1667, an Englishman, Thomas Glover, was surprised by an unidentified pinniped while alone in a boat on the Rappahannoc River, Virginia. The description he gave – in *Philosophical Transactions*, vol 11, 1700 (p566, vol 3, of the abridged series, 1731) – because it is a straightforward observation, devoid of references to traditional mermen – allows us to use it for comparison..

Glover heard "a great rushing and flashing of water," and then saw near him "a most prodigious creature, much resembling a man, standing right up in the water, with his head, neck, shoulders, breast and waist to the cubits of his arms above water. His skin was tawny, *much like that of an Indian*; his head pyramidal and sleek without hair; his eyes large and black, and so were his eyebrows; his mouth very wide, with a broad, black streak on the upper lip, turning upwards at each end like mustachios; his countenance grim and terrible." After gazing at Glover, the animal plunged, revealing a tail "like the tail of a fish".

[18] ■ S. Dewdney and K.E. Kidd 1967 [1962]. See illustration.

Dewdney translates *"Maymaygwayshi"* as "Rock medicine man", but notes various other meanings: "fairy", "ghost", "spirit", "merman" and even "monkey". These entities were believed to be "only two or three feet high" and to live behind or inside waterside rocks. (Dewdney & Kidd pp13–14.)



Selwyn Dewdney's painting of the pictograph of a *Maymaygwayshi* on a ledge above the Nipigon River. From Dewdney & Kidd, *Indian rock paintings of the Great Lakes* **(1967 [1962])** [Courtesy of the University of Toronto Press ©]

FABULOUS CREATURES ON THE DISSECTING TABLE

ADORNO
"PSEUDO-CONCRETENESS"

The whole process of concretizing, the search for exhibits, and the drawings, all these assertive means coagulated soft beliefs and indefinite sightings into hardened plausibility. From the erudition of the 17th century to modern cryptozoology, a scientific study or description is a decisive factor in converting unbelievable legends into quite credible guesses. The selection of data, the dissection of fabulous beings and the admission of their more 'reasonable' elements, gave to purely imaginary creations the solidity of scientific models.

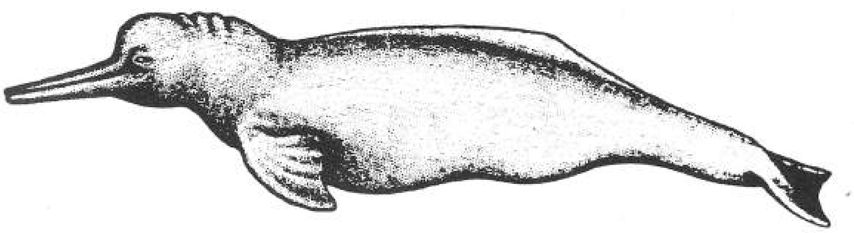
Masters of such methods were the Jesuits. Their scope was the strengthening of tradition. The dragon, Leviathan, and the unicorn were attested by the Bible and the Church Fathers, and therefore their quest for knowledge was largely apologetical. To prove the reality of the dragon was to gain a victory for the authority of the Church over the doubts of heretics and libertines. Small wonder, then, that amongst the apostles of dragons and mermaids we find a great number of Jesuits, of whom special mention must be made of Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680), who gave a seal of learned approval to a whole fantastic zoo of two-footed snakes and bat-winged dragons. The integration of the "sea monster" of the Richelieu River into a work of natural history, therefore, had an ideological background. Father Nicolas was not only a religious missionary among the heathen, he was also the advocate of Christian science, asserting tradition through the discovery of a weird carcass.

The Jesuits of Hispanic America were the pioneers of such quests. A long time before the shooting of the Canadian fishman, colleagues of Louis Nicolas had described, in a scholarly way, the river- and sea-dwelling *Igpupiara* ("dweller in the water") of Brazil. Father Fernão Cardim explained, in his *Trato do Terra e Gente do Brasil* (1585), that these "mermen" can only be distinguished from humans by their deep sunken eyes. Their females are beautiful, with long hair. They kill men by gripping the body of their prey in a vice-like embrace. When they feel that their victim is dead, they moan mournfully. They leave their mark on the corpses, eating only the eyes, nose, tips of toes and fingers, and the genitals. Bodies mutilated in this way are found on the beaches. [**19**]

In 1554, a widely reported incident occurred which merited a whole chapter in Pero de Magalhanes de Gandavo's *History of the province of Sancta Cruz* (1575). On the coast of Sam Vicente [sic], the son of a local Portuguese captain was alarmed by the cries of a female Amerindian slave which drew his attention to an "enormous mass" wandering along the beach. Interpreting it as a "sea-monster", the young man, armed with a sword, blocked its path to the sea. Frustrated, "the monster raised itself erect like a man, supporting itself on its tail fin." Seizing the opportunity, the youth, Baltasar Ferreira, plunged his sword into its belly. The wounded beast tried to tear Ferreira to pieces "with its teeth and claws", but as more natives rushed to help the combat was quickly finished. The next day, the monster was publicly exposed. According to Magalhanes de Gandavo its body was covered with hair, "and on its muzzle it had long hairs similar to whiskers." He concludes by noting that "Indians in this land call it *Hipupiara*, that is to say 'water demon'. Such creatures have been seen in the same area before, but rarely." [**20**]

The incident was preserved for posterity in a fascinating German engraving, published in Augsburg in 1559 [see illustration opposite]. This broadsheet shows the "sea-wonder" (*"Meerwunder"*) as a *giant* with a seal-like head adorned with tufts of whiskers. The unknown artist has tried to convey the treble nature of the creature through the form of various appendages: as a *sea-beast* it has a pinniped's muzzle; as a *humanoid monster* it has long arms and hands; and as a hermaphrodite *demon* it displays devilish bird-claws and a penis as well as breasts. The drawing is testimony to the wavering status of monsters in the 16th century: are they hell-spawns or natural oddities?

If we return to the local legend of the *Igpupiara*, we discover that under this broad concept many real animals seem to lend their shapes and habits. The Igpupiara is a *sea mammal*. One type corresponds to the Amazonian dolphin (*Inia geoffroyensis*) with its long and *hairy* beak. The Burgundian clergyman Jean de Léry (1534–1613) took part in the colonial enterprises of De Villegagnon in Brazil between 1556 and 1558.

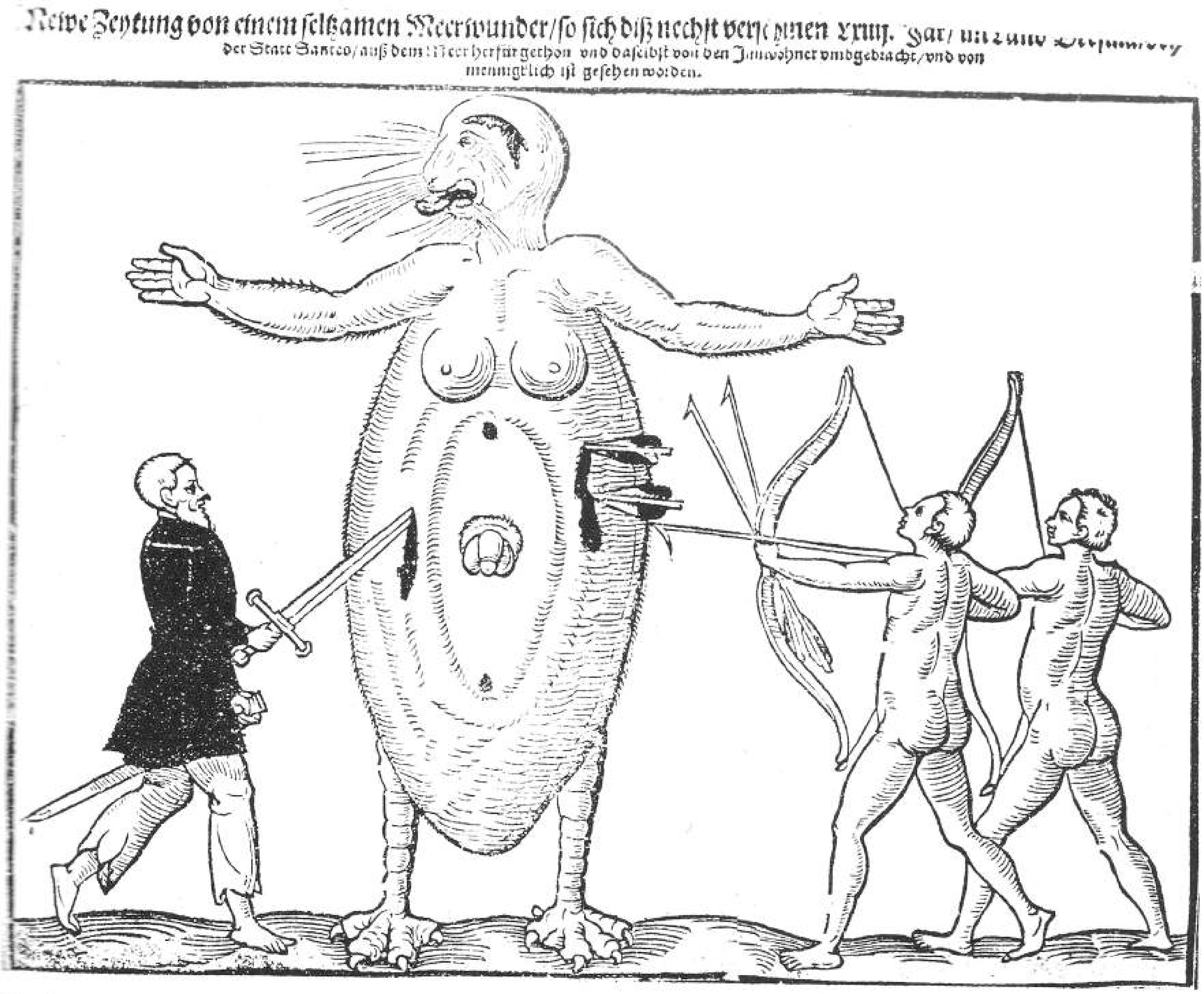


A drawing of the fresh water dolphin *Inia geoffroyensis*, also known as the *Boutu* (or *Boto*), a specific adaptation to the Amazon river complex; from Ivan Sanderson, *Follow the whale* (1958).

According to Sanderson (p365ff), the Boutu has an average length of between six and seven feet, and has large flippers upon which it can "raise its forequarters off the ground when completely out of the water."

19 ■ Luis da Camara-Cascudo, 'Los mitos de las aguas del Brasil,' in *Anuario de la Sociedad Folklorica de Mexico*, vol 5, 1945, pp14–15.

20 ■ P. de Magalhanes de Gandavo 1837 [1576].


Newe Zeytung von einem ſeltzamen Meerwunder/ſo ſich diß nechſt verſchinen xxiiij. Jar/
der Statt Sancto/auß dem Meer herfürgethon vnd daſelbſt von den Inwohner vmbgebracht/vnd von
menniglich iſt geſehen worden.

The battle between Baltasar Ferreira and the *Igpupiara*, as represented in a German broadsheet from Augsburg (1559). [Fortean Picture Library]

In 1578 de Léry published an account of this failed attempt to found the "Antarctic France", and from the chapter on Brazilian fauna we extract the story of an Amerindian fishing at sea. A sea-creature burst from the water close by and put a "fin" into his boat. The terrified native chopped it off and found "it had five fingers, like a human hand". Then the "fish" showed its head and the native saw a human face. [21]

Doubtless, the episode referred to the *Igpupiara*, even if the motif of the mutilated mermaid was well-known in Europe and often used to substantiate the numerous "mermaid's hands" formerly kept in the 'Cabinet of Curiosities' of scholars and collectors. The Amazonian dolphin has a pectoral flipper showing signs of five digits, and under the influence of a marine folklore it could be taken for a humanoid hand. But how can one confuse the 'smiling' beaked face of the dolphin with a human one? That one can – and furthermore, that Europeans have done – is shown by the following text from another Jesuit, Father Simon de Vasconcelos (1597–1616). He tells us that he saw, with his own eyes, *Igpupiara* skeletons heaped on the sea-shore: "I saw their skulls, and they offered no differences to those of men and women, except for a hole in the back of the head, through which they breathe." [22]

This aperture is obviously the blow-hole of a dolphin. If a learned Jesuit, scrutinizing a dolphin's skull at close quarters,

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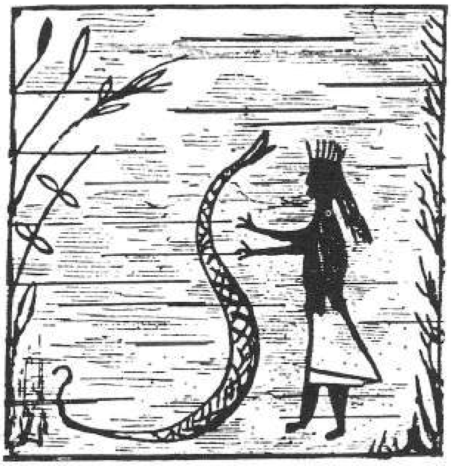
[21] ■ J. de Lery 1580, p169.

[22] ■ Cited by Luis da Camara-Cascudo, 'Los mitos de las aguas del Brasil,' in *Annuario de la Sociedad Folklorica de Mexico*, vol 5, 1945, p15.

Horned–Serpent eggs. [26] Here the wife was a stranger to the tribe, a Sioux. Another squaw of this group, a prisoner of the Piegans, disquieted her husband by her frequent solitary wanderings in the woods. Suspecting the existence of a lover, he forced the Sioux woman, Onwi–Menocha ("Moon woman"), to participate in a public confessional ritual, the "dance of the secret loves". Each woman performs a charade of mime and drawing, which the other women must decode to discover her secret admirer. Onwi–Menocha finally entered the circle. This is how she behaved: "She threw her coat off and stood completely naked. Her whole body was painted green. Nobody knew the significance of this masquerade. She began her dance which was supposed to reveal this secret admirer. She lay down and started to crawl on the grass. Sometimes she half rose and hissed, then she curved herself again towards the ground. The spectators, stupefied, watched. Suddenly one of them cried: '*The serpent! The serpent is her lover!*' The cry spread with dread and horror. '*Kill her! The serpent is her lover*!' However, Onwi–Menocha stood, gleaming, near the sacred stone, and hissed in their faces. She disappeared, but continued invisibly *to protect her husband's hunting*. She appeared to him in dreams and told him that she lived with the *Great Serpent of Hell*." [27]



The woman who loved a lake-serpent. An illustration to the Passamaquoddy tale, scraped on birch bark by Tomah Josephs, an Indian Governor in Maine, and informant of Leland's. From C.G. Leland, *The Algonquin legends of New England* **(1884).**

Among the American Indians, the Great Serpent is everywhere linked to the hunt and to fishing, both in the sea and in fresh water. Haietlik, of the Nootkas of Vancouver Island, was considered to be very precious, and fishermen offered, for part of his skin, 20 sea–otter skins. They believed that if they carried his flesh in their canoe, they were sure of killing a whale. [28]

The Great Lynx had the stature of a Master–of–Fishes in the Great Lakes. Father Allouez, who fought the belief, reported: "They make good sacrifices for sturgeon fishing". In 1672 this Jesuit confirmed that fishing tribes around Puans Bay held the same belief: "*Missipissy* is like their Neptune; they offer banquets to this water god in order to obtain sturgeons." [29]

At the end of the last century, explorers for the Canadian government found the water god in Lake Winnipeg under the name of *Miskena*. "At the end of a spit of land, the lake descends to its greatest depth. It is here that the Indians have established their winter camp, as there are many sturgeons in the depths. According to the beliefs of the poor natives who fish there in the winter, it is during this period of the year, in the deepest part of the lake, that the sturgeon hides and keeps counsel with Miskena, the Chief of the Fishes, in the southern part of Lake Winnipeg." [30]

Now, Lake Winnipeg communicates with the Saskatchewan River, where observations of a monster have been registered [31], as well as in the Lake of the Woods, where the mysterious pictograph of a Serpent-Sturgeon is reminiscent of Miskena. The largest *maskinongés*, which are said never to leave the bottom, and about which we've heard at the lake of the same name, share some fabulous traits with this king of Lake Winnipeg.

Insofar as he is Master of the wind and of the waters, the serpent can bring about tempests and swells. For the

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26 ■ Two novelists - Jeff Danziger (*The Champlain Monster*, Vermont, 1981) and Corinne Normand-Hudon (*Pohénégamook*, Sainte-Foy, 1981) – present lake monsters as *egg-laying*.
Sometime before 1897, in Campiglio in the Tyrol, a dragon's egg was on display. See: A. Heyl 1897.

27 ■ H.R. Rieder 1952.

28 ■ C.F. Newcombe, 'Petroglyphs in British Columbia,' in *Victoria Times* 10 September 1907.

29 ■ Jesuits 1666–1667.
See also: Jesuits 1673.

30 ■ H.Y. Hind 1859.

31 ■ R.S. Lambert 1955.

Chickasaws of the Mississippi, he unleashes them with the aim of travelling from one river to another on turbulent flood. [32] As in Europe, he can change his form, and under human appearance he can seduce and abduct women. A mythical landscape surrounds the places he haunts; among the Coeur–d'Alénes of British Columbia there is a lake called *Hînqûmemen*, the *"Engulfer"*. The Indians avoid it with terror; whoever draws water there is pursued by the lake, which brings him back and drowns him. [33]

The monster has underground passages leading from one expanse of water to another – as we have learned at Lakes Pohénégamook and Témiscouata – where he can bring his victims. According to the Coeur–d'Alénes, the "Mysteries" (ie. the monsters) of certain lakes use subterranean corridors leading to streams on the summits of their mountains. Four sisters, who were bathing, once saw what they took to be an enormous fish in a deep basin of the Saint–Joe River. They swam to this place and then disappeared. According to their companions, the thing that they had glimpsed was in fact "the tongue of the Mystery of the waters". Some time later the scalps of the vanished women were found high in the mountain, on the shores of a little lake, proving a communication between the two bodies of water. [34] The curious story of an Indian family swamped by Naitaka, and whose canoe was discovered, it is said, many years later perched on a mountain, far from Lake Okanagan, must be attributed to a similar tradition. [35]

The door to the underground kingdom of the serpents is guarded by pictographs. These paintings are not simple naturalistic representations, but rather a sort of key for entering into communication with them, if it is so desired. [36] The images are active, lively and magical. At certain times, from certain angles, and in certain seasons, observation permits the viewer to see these drawings move. Mirages, well known to the travellers of the Great Lakes, can also play their role. [37] In any case, these serpents of watery yellow, like their representations, are the legitimate guardians of the threshold of lakes and rapids.

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32 ■ J.R. Swanton, *Social and religious beliefs of the Chickasaw Indians*, Bureau of American Ethnology. Report 44, 1926, 7.

33 ■ J. Teit, *The Salishan tribes of the Western Plateaus*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 47, 1927.

34 ■ *ibidem*.

35 ■ R.S. Lambert 1955.

36 ■ Dewdney records, of the rocks inhabited by *Maymaygwayshi*, that "specially gifted Ojibwa shamans had the power to enter the rock and exchange tobacco for an extremely potent 'rock medicine'." (Dewdney & Kidd 1967 [1962], p14.)

37 ■ H.R. Schoolcraft 1851.

THE MONSTER
IS 'MYSTERY'
OF LANDSCAPES
ANIMAL FORM.

CHAPTER 4

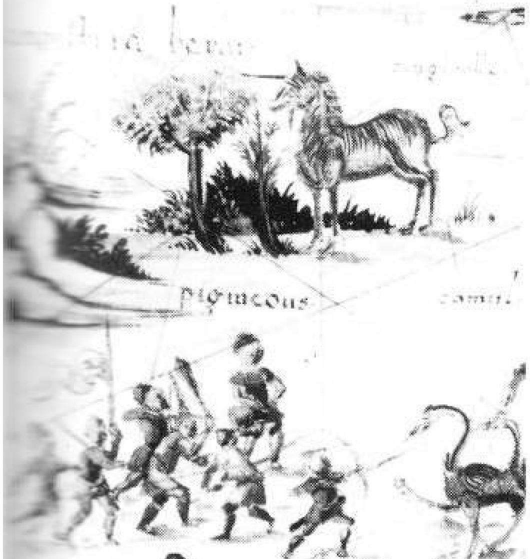
THE WATER–HORSE OF NEW FRANCE

4.1

THE PYGMIES AND THE UNICORN

> *"... a rich harvest of stories about the monsters of the coast waters, the principal rivers, and the lakes of Canada. The Indians had already populated the fresh waters with different giants and mythical serpents, well before the arrival of the white man. The settlers, coming from Scandinavia, from Iceland, and from Germany, had no difficulty in identifying these monsters with their 'water-horses' and other evil spirits of their native folklore, which they remembered. Last, but not least, the ships' captains who developed the fisheries of the east and west coasts brought with them their own tradition of giant squids and sea-serpents and other monsters of the ocean."*
>
> R.S. Lambert, *Investigating the Supernatural: The Weird in Canadian Folklore.*

A portion of Pierre Descellier's Planisphere (1550), showing part of New France (which he called Canada) with the unicorns and pygmies believed to inhabit the interior. [British Museum ©]



The first monsters which the founders of New France took to account were the water monsters, haunting the islands and the running waters. There is nothing surprising in this, as the penetration of the country was made by the great waterways, first and foremost the Saint-Lawrence. This type of exploration led the whites to become interested in any information with which the Indians could furnish them about the difficulties of river travel. As Joseph McGuire has shown, the *rumours* peddled by the tribes, first to the forts and then to the fur traders, preceded and, in some ways, oriented the discoverers. [1]

We can go further: by means of these rumours, the mental universe of the indigenous people was revealed to the settlers, a universe which they accepted or refused, according to its points of agreement or of friction with their own. Long before disembarking, the Europeans had done a great deal of imagining about what they would find. The first steps were still close to their conceptions. The French were convinced they would discover, somewhere in the forests of the New World, the fabulous unicorn. The map of New France designed by Descellier in 1550 depicts pygmies as well as the unicorn.

This strange horned horse must have had a hard life, as the German author Olfert Dapper continued to locate the unicorn, even in 1673, "within the boundaries of Canada". [2] As for the pygmies, they came from a mixture of European and Indian beliefs. In the 1530s Jacques Cartier expected to discover these familiar dwarfs from the maps that he used. [3] The tribes have a whole cycle of legends about dwarfs; the *Migamawesus* of the Gaspé mountains, or the little people of the Micmacs, for example. Whether from sincerity or as a tactic, they would speak to the foreigners about the country of little men, and perhaps the Whites would go to see for themselves and take their overly large boats with them...

To the extent that colonisation progressed, the rumours peddled by the Indians were more and more discouraging; enormous waterfalls, engulfing monsters and so on. From commercial motives also, especially if a tribe wanted to keep

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1 ■ J. MacGuire, 'Ethnology in the Jesuit Relations,' in *American Anthropologist*, vol 3, 1901.

2 ■ O. Dapper 1673. See also: O. Shepard 1930.

3 ■ Biggar 1924.

the monopoly of commerce with the Europeans, its enemies, farther along the river, were described as caricatures of humanity. Thus the Souriquois (Micmacs) confided to one of Champlain's captains – the Breton Prévert – that their adversaries, the Armouchiquois of Acadia, were "wild and monstrous men". When they are seated on their heels, "their knees pass more than a half-foot above their heads, a strange thing which seems unnatural". [**4**] Inevitably, the advance of colonisation destroyed this fable, and Marc Lescarbot, six years later, enjoyed noting that the supposed *wild men* "are men as beautiful as we are". [**5**]

These monstrous races of men, heirs to medieval notions, are "pushed back to the edges" of the newly discovered country. [**6**] However, other beliefs are hardier, defying such sceptics as Lescarbot. *The spirits of waters and of woods, therefore, are as much a part of the European mental universe as of the Indian*: their fusion is effected by the sincerity of terror. The French were happy to replace the evil spirits of the natives with their own devils; but the credibility remained the same. The haunted islands of the Saint-Lawrence, avoided by the bark boats, would be avoided likewise by the navigators of New France. What became the *"Poincte-aux-Vaches"*, at the mouth of the Saguenay, was named, from the time of Champlain, the "Point-of-all-the-Devils". [**7**]

Captain Prévert, whom we saw bring faith to the "savages" of the Souriquois, had another misadventure with a mythic Indian personage. This is how Champlain recorded it: "In an island near the Baye des Chaleurs, a dreadful monster lived which the savages called *Gougou*, and they told me that it had the shape of a woman, but terrifying, and of such a size that, they told me, the end of the masts of our ship would come only to her waist, so large did they depict her, and that often it gorged itself on savages, which it put into a great pouch, when it could trap them, and then eat them; and those who had avoided the peril of this unhappy beast told us that its pouch was so big that it could put our entire boat in it. This monster made horrible noises inside of its island... Even the Sieur Prévert of Sainct-Malo [sic] told me that he had passed so close to the dwelling of this dreadful beast, while going to discover mines, that he and all of his vessels heard strange whistlings from the noise that she made..." [**8**]

It was not unnatural that Captain Prévert, as a man of his time, believed in giants; many of his contemporaries situated these monsters also in the New World. Doctor Simon Goulart wrote in 1620: "The West Indies are the site of many giants, as those who have written the histories attest". [**9**] In 1613, just ten years after Champlain's first expedition, it was thought that the bones of a thirteen-foot-high colossus, the famous King Theutobochus, had been exhumed in France; in they were identified by early paleontologists as the remains of a mastodon. [**10**] Brittany knew, notably, the *Hok-Braz*, which swallowed three-masted boats for its breakfast. [**11**]

The Micmacs succeeded in transmitting to the French the mythological figure of the *Gougou* – also *"Gugu"* or *"Gugwe"* – the giant cannibal with enormous hands and a hairy bear-like

4 ■ *Relation de 1603*, in S. de Champlain 1870.

5 ■ M. Lescarbot 1611.
See also: Victor V. Tremblay, 'Le Saguenay de Lescarbot,' in *Saguenayensia*, vol 7, N° 1, January-February 1965.

6 ■ F.M. Gagnon, 'Le thème médiéval de l'homme sauvage dans les représentations des Indiens d'Amérique,' in Gagnon 1975 B.

7 ■ *"Poincte-de-tous-les-Diables"*. See: S. de Champlain 1870.

8 ■ S. de Champlain 1870.

9 ■ S. Goulart 1620.

10 ■ N. Habicot 1673.
The bones were discovered on 11 January 1613, near the castle of Chaumont (Dauphiné), in a region known locally as the *"Champ des Géants"*. They have since been reclassified as the remains of the elephant-like *Deinotherium*. Wendt, 1970, p32.

11 ■ P.Y. Sébillot 1968 A, vol 2.

face, similar to *Atcen* of the Montagnais, which the missionaries had heard of, an ogre which cut off the heads of sleeping men. [12] The Gougou became a tradition of the sailors of the Saint-Lawrence, and its island one for all boats to avoid. [13] These islands, as was indicated on the maps, established a mythic, syncretic geography in the newly discovered country. There is little doubt that the "Isles des Diables" near Labrador, which Thévet mentions in 1558 [14], are Belle Isle and Quirpon, where the sailors would only land with a crucifix in their hands. [15] The "Isle of Demons" of the territory of Newfoundland – known to posterity because of the sojourn of a female Robinson Crusoe – is another of these diabolical domains. [16]

For sailing folk, the the discovery of America was often the discovery of terror.

4.2

TRACKS AND WAKES OF THE MONSTERS

Often a strange 'foot print' would suffice to set anxiety in motion. It is a sort of emissary of this wilderness, which the Europeans groped to discover, and its vagueness fanned their anxiety. On one mysterious island, between Detroit and Montréal, "many Indians and French have come on shore and have never returned. When they would be some distance into the woods, those who had stayed with the canoes would hear screams; once fourteen men disappeared at a time, and another company keeping watch two days and two nights, a few steps from there, learned nothing of their departure. The Indians called it the *"Island of the Devil"*; they discovered well-trodden trails and tracks on the sandy beach, which could have been made by a large man or a bear; the French think that it is a dragon which killed the men". [1]

These prints of a man (or bear) of a great height lead one to think of the *Wendigo*, the wild man of the Indians, who is said to have left tracks a mixture of bear paws and split hooves. [2] David Thompson, crossing the gorge of the Athabasca River in the Rockies during the winter of 1811, also saw bizarre traces resembling those of a bear, but much larger, whose paws seemed to disappear. [3] For the Indians these tracks were those of a "young mammoth"; perhaps they wanted to designate a being similar to *No-Kos-Ma* of the Cree, a sort of mammoth-like black bear with an enormous snout. [4] The beast of the "Island of the Devil" was, according to the French, one of the dragons of their popular traditions, living half in the water; an avatar of the Tarasque, living "on the shores of the Rhone, next to a large rock in the woods". [5]

The French pitted themselves against the Indian water monsters in the person of Father Marquette, the Jesuit companion of Canadian explorer Louis Joliet, in his discovery of the Mississippi. [6] Marquette records that before their departure, the Menóminees warned them: "The great river is very dangerous when one does not know the difficult places; *it is full*

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[12] ■ E.C. Parsons, 'Mic Mac folklore,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 38, 1925.

See also: F.G. Speck, 'Montagnais and Naskapi tales,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 38, 1925.

[13] ■ C.M. Skinner 1899.

[14] ■ A. Thévet 1558.

[15] ■ C.M. Skinner 1889.

[16] ■ A. Thévet 1558.

Marguerite de La Roque was marooned for nearly 2½ years, with her maid and lover, on Harrington Island, in1541, by her uncle, the sieur de Roberval, an explorer and contemporary of Cartier.

See also: P.A. de Gaspé, 'Une nuit chez les Sorciers,' in Anon 1863.

[1] ■ J.R. Masterson, 'Traveller's tales of colonial natural history,' *Journal of American Folklore*, 1946.

[2] ■ A. Gray 1970.

A note in the Niagara Falls (NY) *Evening Review* for 16 November 1950, records the fears of an Amerindian fishing and trapping community at Berens Lake in the far north-west of Ontario, concerning the attacks of a *"Windigo"*, which, they claim, is "tearing their fishing nets". A White fur-trader had "an artistically-minded Indian" draw a picture of the creature, which was "first seen several months ago", but instead of the expected "transformed human, or werewolf", the native artist drew a creature which "resembled an *alligator*." This Windigo is described as amphibious, coming onto the shores and rapidly slithering underwater again. (Credit: Dwight Whalen.)

[3] ■ D. Thompson 1916.

[4] ■ J.R. Swanton, *Religious beliefs and medical practices of the Cree Indians*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Report 42, 1925.

[5] ■ L. Dumont 1951.

[6] ■ J. Delanglez 1950.

of dreadful monsters which would devour people and canoes altogether; there is even a demon which one can hear from far away which blocks passage and which destroys those who dare to approach it." Later, he wrote: "On the river, we have encountered, from time to time, monstrous fish, one of which hit against our canoe so violently that I believed that it was an *enormous tree* which was going to break it into pieces. Another time we saw a monster on the water which had a *tiger's head*, a pointed nose like a wild cat, with a beard and with *its ears sticking straight up*; the head was grey and the neck all black; we didn't see it very clearly." **[7]** This aquatic feline has all the characteristics of a lynx: the grey winter skin and the ears which end in a tuft of hair. Had Marquette ever heard the stories of the Great Lynx? He had just crossed the Great Lakes, and might have heard of legendary encounters.

Father Marquette's next step led him to one of the great whirlpools in the river, a retreat of the monsters: "We passed by a place feared by the savages because they assumed that there was a *'Manitou'*, that is to say *a demon, which devoured passers-by*; it is with this that the savages, who wanted to turn us back from our enterprise, threatened us. Here is the demon. It's a small hollow among rocks, 20 feet high, where all of the current of the river disgorges, and was turned back against the flow, and stopped by the nearby island and forced to pass via a small canal; this doesn't happen without a furious combat, in which all of the waters turn one on the other with a great thundering, which frightens the savages, who fear everything." **[8]**

Master of the art of rationalising the demons of others, Father Marquette didn't have time to see the monster of the rapids. Nor was he aware that he and Joliet had travelled past the artificial hillocks built by the mysterious Adena culture, of which the most famous is also the largest Serpent effigy in the world, the *Great Serpent Mound* of Ohio. **[9]**

Although these monsters were absent from the cascades, the Jesuit was able, at least, to see painted images on the cliffs and contributed, involuntarily, to the creation of a fantastic, completely incongruous beast: "As we approached the rocks, frightfully high and wide, we saw on one of them paintings of two monsters, which frightened us at first, and *on which even the hardiest savages did not dare to rest their eyes for very long*; they're as big as deer, with a fearful expression, red eyes, a beard like a tiger's, the face was something like a man's, the body covered with scales and the tail, longer than the body, passing above the head and returning between the legs, it ends in a poisonous barb. Green, red and black are the three colours of which it is composed. As we came upon these monsters we were floating peacefully on beautiful clear and tranquil water, then we heard the sound of a rapid into which we were about to fall. I've never seen anything more frightful, a great number of enormous trees, and branches, little floating isles, came from the mouth of the Pekitanoui River with as much vigour as one could expose oneself to in crossing it, without great danger." **[10]**

Marquette didn't make the connection between the hieroglyphs and the terrible falls, but for us these fish-men were

Opposite, sideways: **The Great Serpent Mound of Adams County, in southern Ohio, photographed from the air by Dr Georg Gerster.** [© John Hillelson Agency.]

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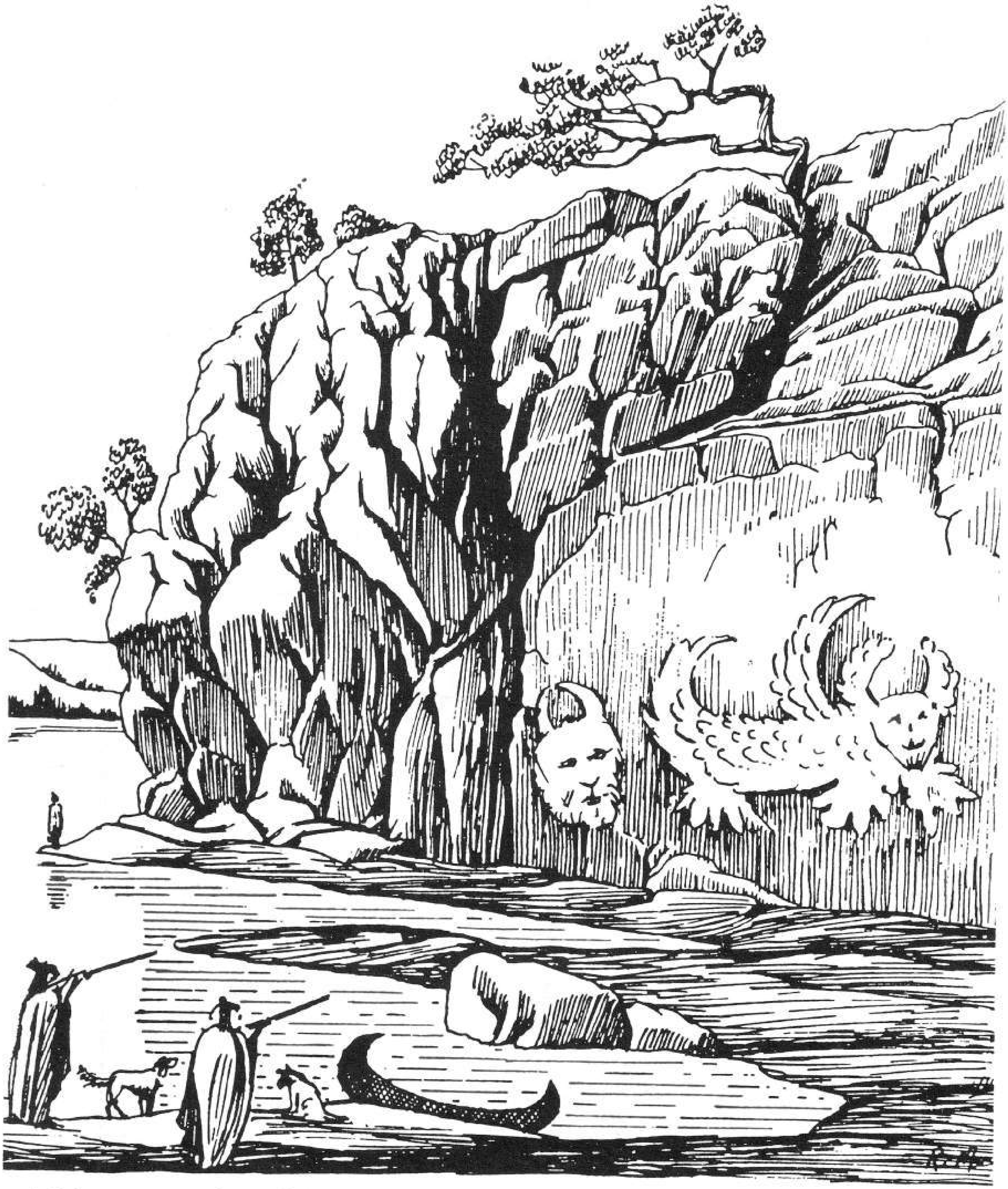
7 ■ R.J. Marquette 1855.

8 ■ *ibidem*.

9 ■ R. Silverberg 1970.
Dean Snow thinks that the building of the "dragon's mound" was "possibly inspired by the passing of a comet", which would link, once again, serpents and luminous phenomena. See: Snow 1977.

10 ■ R.J. Marquette 1855.



An impression of the pictographs, said to represent the Piasa, painted onto a bluff overlooking the Missouri River, south of Alton, Illinois. From H. Lewis, *The valley of the Mississippi illustrated* **(1854). See also, caption on next page.**

certainly representations of divinities residing in the whirlpool, which is confirmed by the detail that "even the most hardy savages did not dare to rest their eyes on it for a long time", fearing, as did their brothers of Nicola Lake, the risk of shipwreck due to the vengeance of the water demon.

It had been thought that the beings in the mural might be identified with the spirits of the indigenous folklore, with goat's heads. [11] Nevertheless, later travellers, who avidly sought Marquette's monsters on the Mississippi, were only able to distinguish very deteriorated traces. This did not prevent

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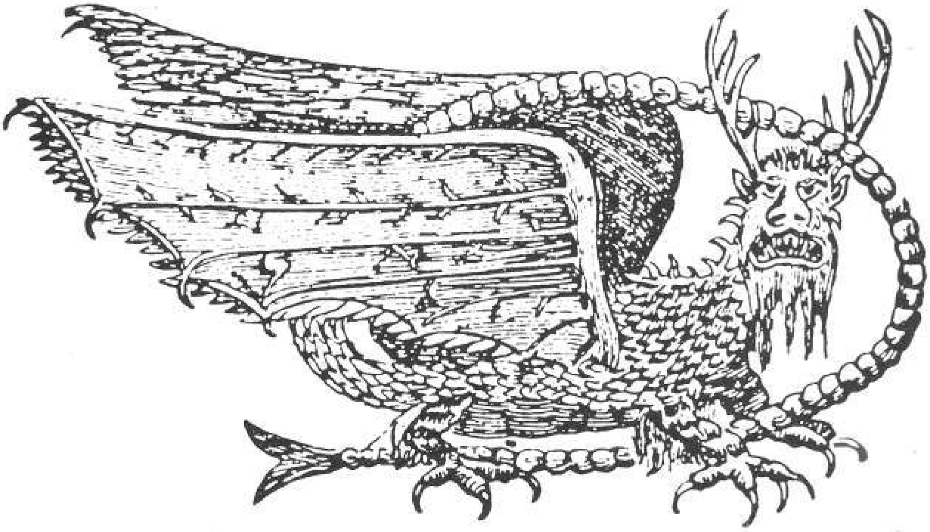
[11] ■ G. Benwell and A. Waugh 1961.



Indian travellers, from a variety of tribes, would not pass the Piasa image at Alton without pulling up on the facing shore and firing their arrows at it, as Marquette records. Whether they did this out of fear or as an offering the early chroniclers could not agree.

As the rifle replaced the bow the old image was soon erased by bullets and more fanciful reconstructions were attempted (but no longer on the original site) by local artists and municipal historians. This version – from P.A. Armstrong, *The Piasa: or the Devil among the Indians* **(1887) – has been widely promoted as the 'original' design.** [Fortean Picture Library]

romancers and journalists from providing dithyrambic descriptions, supplying colours from their own imaginations for the worn-out colours of the pictographs, as well as transforming a spirit of the river into a winged reptile "with the body and the paws of an alligator, the wings of an eagle, the horns of an elk and the ears of a fox, a human face, mouth, teeth and the moustache of a tiger, tail of a serpent or of a fish."

This winged demon – the *Piasa* – or rather the few sufficiently undefinable beasts which stem from the *thunderbird*, were the object of a whole cycle of false Indian legends, feverishly concocted by opportunistic Longfellows. We can see in these fabricated creatures – like those of Doctor Moreau – the results of an entire zoo cut into pieces and hastily reassembled. The monster attacked an army of Miamis and decimated them in full march; it took their chief in its powerful embrace. The lairs of the beast are described as being filled with skeletons. These ingredients were destined to satisfy a public, starved for black romanticism, with an Indian sauce. The author P.A. Armstrong assembled a collection of these fables in 1887. It was barely one year after Geronimo and his Apaches had launched their last assaults. The Indian was conquered and with him his culture.

Armstrong denies that the Indians could have enough mastery of anatomical design to have executed the portrait of the two monsters. According to Armstrong, the painters of Piasa "seemed to have been familiar with the descriptions of the holy scriptures" concerning the seven-headed beast of the Apocalypse. He is a man of his time; the author wanted to mix the Bible and paleontology. The Piasa is, for him, a prehistoric animal, the *rhamphorynchid*, a reptile with bat's wings and the mouth of a crocodile, known to the Indians' ancestors. [12] We remain baffled before this creature of the century of positivism, whose godfathers were St. John and Charles Cuvier.

It is true that Armstrong is only one among many other practitioners of a literary genre who attribute to an "advanced" civilisation (ie. neo-European) the building of all of these ancient monuments of the Mississippi valley, particularly the famous hillocks. In 1839, Cornelius Mathew offered his *Behemoth: A legend of the Mound Builders*, in which he depicted another

PALEONTOLOGY
IN LIEU WITH CHRISTIAN
ESCHATOLOGY OF VICTORIAN
SCIENCE IS AFFIRMED BY THE
INDIGENOUS BELIEF
AS SUPPLEMENT

[SIMILAR TO MEMOIRS BY HAWKINS]

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[12] P.A. Armstrong 1887.

another prehistoric colossus, the mammoth, destroying the cities of the 'Mound Builder' civilisation, and of course his monster bore the name of the giant beast of the Bible, 'Behemoth'. The moral of this story: the Amerindian monster, to its surprise, has been provided with theatrical accessories, completely useless in his wet kingdom: membrane-thin wings, rapacious claws, and moustache *á la* Groucho Marx!

4.3

THE HUNT FOR NEPTUNE

Tradition can sometimes be wrong. Until recently, an album of antique drawings, published in 1930 by its editor Marc de Villiers, had been widely attributed to an attourney at the office of the Provost of Québec, Charles Bécard de Grandville (1675–1703). Called the *'Codex Canadiensis'* or the *Rarities of the Indies*, this collection of manuscript illustrations offers us a rich corpus of North American fauna from early colonial times. [**1**]

However, Anne Marie Sioui has since compared this *Codex* with a manuscript preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris – the *Natural history of the West Indies* by a Jesuit, Father Louis Nicolas – and has established correspondences between the two treatises. [**2**] Fate separated the two manuscripts: the *Codex* ending up at the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, at Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the *Natural history* at the Bibliothèque Nationale. I, too, have compared the two and I am fully satisfied that they are both by Nicolas and intended to complement one another.

Louis Nicolas was born in the Languedoc province of France in 1634 and went as a missionary to New France in 1663. He returned to France in 1675 and began work on his *Natural history*. [**3**] His religious activities took place during the last stage of the great Jesuit missions (1660–1675), and concentrated on the tribes of the Algonkian family around the Great Lakes. [**4**] As a result of his contacts with the Amerindian, Nicolas wrote, in 1672–1674, an *Algonkian grammar*, which has also remained in manuscript. In its introduction, Nicolas states that he had to learn "the most barbaric language" in order to talk to "nations without human nature", and he concluded: "I made myself a child among children. I wandered with savages through the wilderness." [**5**]

As a preliminary to our study of the *Natural history*, this statement is useful to us. Nicolas is not a modern ethnologist, attempting to get as close as he can to another culture. Right from the start, the French Jesuit is convinced of the superiority of his way of life. He, the Christian, will bring Truth to the heathen, and although he adapts to their ways he remains aware of his status as a subject of the Sun King, a son of a polished country. He sees himself in the role of a messenger of maturity and order to a world of childish barbarity.

When we open his *Natural history* we find signs of this

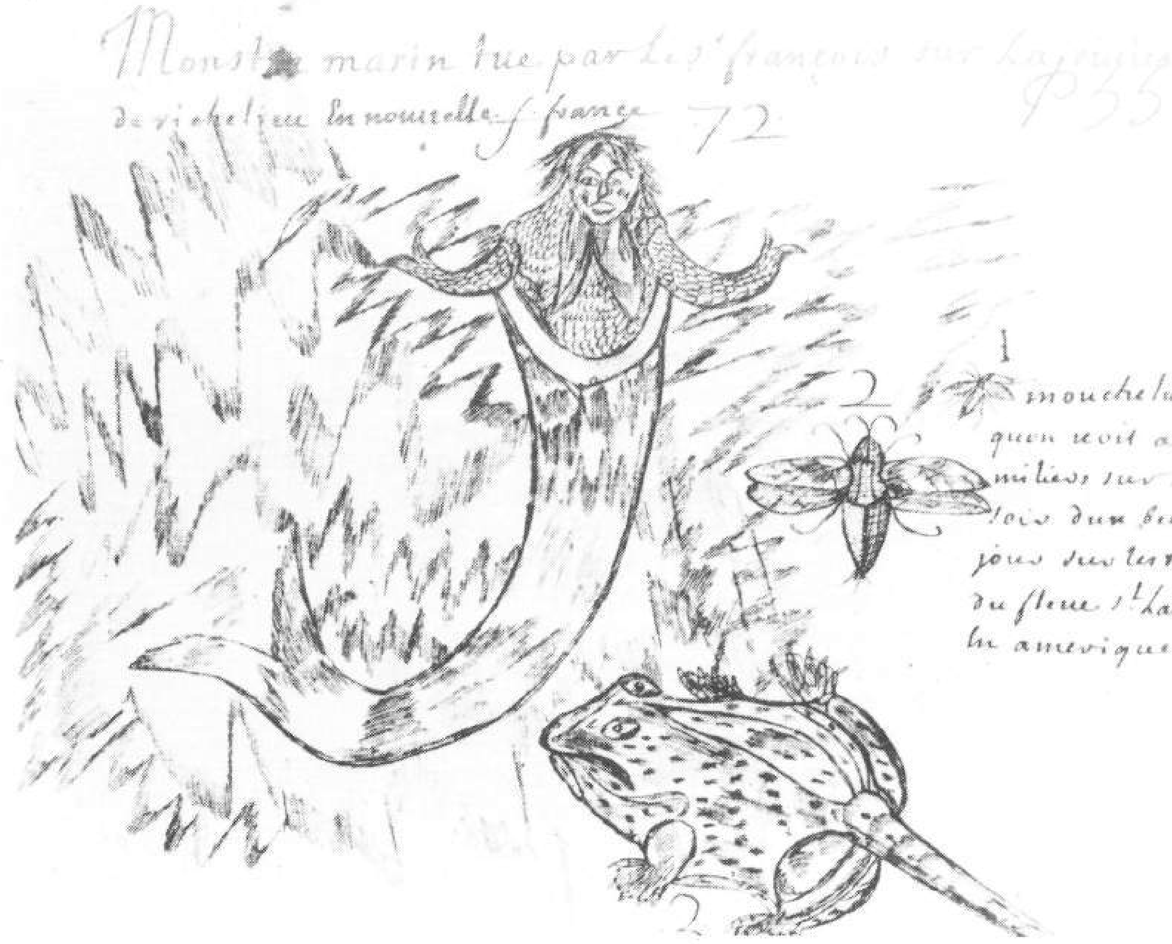
1 ■ *Les raretés des Indes* ('Codex Canadiensis'), 1930 – wrongly attributed to Charles Bécard.

2 ■ Anne Marie Sioui, 'Qui est l'auteur du Codex Canadiensis?' in *Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec*, vol 8, N° 4, 1979, pp271–279.

3 ■ C. Sommervogel 1960, p1709.
See also: Anne Marie Sioui, 'Qui est l'auteur du Codex Canadiensis?' in *Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec*, vol 8, N° 4, 1979, pp271–279.

4 ■ L. Groulx 1960, vol 1, pp105–109.

5 ■ L. Nicolas 1672, folio 4.


Monstre marin tue par les françois sur la riviere de richelieu en nouvelle france 72
P55
1
mouche luisante quen voit a milieus sur le soir dun beau jour sur les rives du fleuve St Laurant en amerique
2
2

Louis Nicolas' illustration of the merman of the Richlieu River; from the *Natural history...* **(c1675).** [© Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris]

THE HYPERBOLE AND SUPERFLUITY OF THE NEW WORLD — 'THE WITNESS AND THE OTHER WORLD' BY MARY E. CAMPBELL

dualistic approach. In studying North American Nature Father Nicolas discovers in it the same disorder he detected in the society of the "savages": the land and the beasts are all extreme. He writes, in the *Codex*, that "the Gulf of the Saint-Lawrence is larger than the entire Mediterranean"; and in the *Natural history* he notes that rattlesnakes can reach "18 to 20 feet in length", and a kind of reptile lazes on the shore "as big and as long as a wooden beam." [**6**] The element of water hides gargantuan monsters. Full of awe and wonder, Father Nicolas reports the tremendous fights of the huge whales in the Gulf, the blows of their tails sounding like a warship's broadsides. [**7**]

After the terrors come the marvels of the deep: on folio 35 of the *Codex Canadiensis*, the Jesuit has sketched a strange creature with a roundish head, long hair and a goatee. Its scale-covered body ends in a curved fishtail; it waves its forked fins and fixes us with a slightly menacing air. The drawing represents "a sea-monster killed by the French on the Richelieu River in New France."

The iconography of the creature corresponds to that of a particular type of merman, the Old Man of the Sea. It is a borrowing from the figures of bearded tritons and the Neptunes on contemporary charts. Such images were imported into colonial Canada, as demonstrated by Marc Lescarbot's play, *Theatre de Neptune*, presented at Port Royal in Acadia, (Nova Scotia) in 1606. On this first North American stage, the white-bearded and long-haired Master of the Ocean enters in a skiff drawn by six native canoes. French soldiers of the garrison were

[6] L. Nicolas, *Histoire naturelle...* c.1675, folios 60–61.

On folio 168, Nicolas tells the story of a "twenty-foot-long" snake, killed near Clamecy, France, in about 1672. This reptile seized cows by their muzzles, and devoured them in a nearby dale.

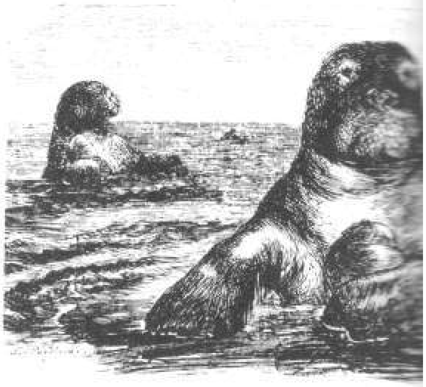
[7] L. Nicolas, *Histoire naturelle...* c.1675, folio 190.

For Louis Nicolas, the "armoured fish" or gar-pike – Champlain's Chaousarou [see App;x 2] could reach 10, even 12 feet in length, "and would be as feared as a crocodile if it had four feet." (*Histoire naturelle...* folio 184.)

costumed as fishes or Amerindians. [8]

Forms similar to this imaginary one were allegedly seen, and described with realism and exactitude. For example, three Frenchmen and three Blacks from Martinique claimed to have seen, in 1671, a merman with "a large and plain face, an enormous snub nose, black hair tinged with grey which hung to his shoulders, and a long beard of seven or eight inches." [9] And, around 1698, according to Reverend John Brand, "several gentlemen" saw, off the Orkneys, "something with its head above the water, which as they could discern, had the face of an old man with a long beard hanging down." [10]

Nicolas' "sea-monster" of the Richelieu River clearly belongs to this type. Some creature shot in the river had been described as though it was an elderly fish-man from the sea-lore of the period. In a treatise dedicated to the local fauna of Canada, the Jesuit has inserted not just an imaginary being, but one which is also the product of the European mind.



The dugong – the Indian Ocean relative of the manatee – in the familiar pose of mermaid reports: from Sir E. Tennant's *Natural history of Ceylon* **(1861).** [Fortean Picture Library]

Nor was the story of the triton of the Richelieu forgotten in the 18th century, as evidenced by an entry in the 'diary' of Father Charlevoix, begun in 1721: "I don't know what credence one should give to what I saw in a manuscript account of an old missionary who claimed to have seen a sea-man in the Rivière de Sorel, three leagues below Chambly." [11] Charlevoix's "Sorel River" is an old name for the Richelieu, and Chambly was a French fort built to protect the city of Montreal against Iroquois raids. The "old missionary" is very likely Father Nicolas. Did he see the merman's remains for himself? Nothing in the terse commentary in the *Codex* allows us to suppose that he did.

The unicorn had already become acclimatized to the New World. [12] Then the classical merman of old travellers' maps fell under the muskets of nervous soldiers. The Canada of Father Nicolas was then a frontier of Knowledge, where Western man might still dream of actually finding the monsters of tradition. Reports of the killing of monsters are important because they seem to encourage such hopes. Louis Nicolas' drawing of the Richelieu fish-man is clearly intended as an *exhibit*; he has taken some pains not to represent some vague description of a faraway rumour, but to render an extraordinary creature frozen by death, that is to say available for a stable scientific description. His naive pen and ink sketch is the equivalent, today, of a blurred and dubious photograph of a stranded wonder of the deep or of an Amazonian ape-man. The thinking behind it remains the same: a carcass is the first step towards tangibility, and a drawing of it, therefore, is a half-step.

THE ROLE OF VISUAL REPRESENTATION IN SOLIDIFYING A SCIENTIFIC OBJECT

THE MONSTERS INAUGURATION INTO NATURALISM REQUIRES ITS RENDERING AS CORPSE – 'DE-MONSTRATION'

[TANUKI KILLED BY TRAIN – FOSTER]

However, Nicolas has not offered us a precise portrait of the Richelieu animal – perhaps a pinniped [13] – but a legendary representation of it. All his efforts to reach a naturalistic description of Nature have, in this case, only contributed to the survival and strengthening of a myth. Thanks largely to Nicolas, the bearded merman had become a subspecies of the Atlantic one; a *Trito barbatus canadiensis* which could be killed and stuffed, or perhaps caught and kept in a great tank at Versailles where His Majesty could toss it raw fish.

The material annexation of North America was reflected in its accession in the realm of imagination. If classical sea-gods can be shot, Amerindian ones risk the same fate. In 1782, Venant Saint-Germain, a merchant from Repentigny, near Montreal, crossing Lake Superior in the area of Pie Island at dusk, saw what he thought was a "child" rise out of the water with one arm extended. It had a little nose, well-formed ears and sparkling eyes. Its brownish complexion and "woolly hair" reminded him of "a young negro". Venant watched the strange little being for approximately three or four minutes. When he raised his gun, one of his companions, an old Amerindian woman, clung to his clothes, pleading with him not to shoot at "the God of the waters and the lakes". The merchant had to submit to her angry protests and the tiny form sank back slowly into the water. The native woman predicted that punishment would come in the form of a storm, which duly manifested later that evening when a violent gale lashed the surface of Lake Superior for three hours. [14]

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[8] ■ V.R. Beaudry 1968.

[9] ■ B. de Maillet 1748.

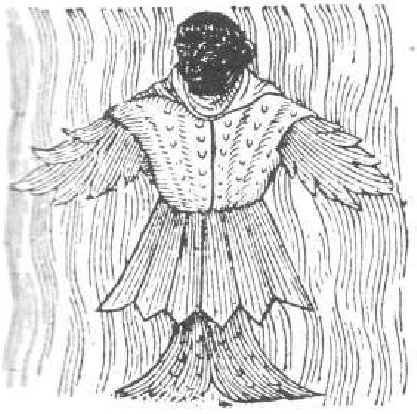
[10] ■ J. Brand 1883 [1701], p171.

[11] ■ Charlevoix 1744.

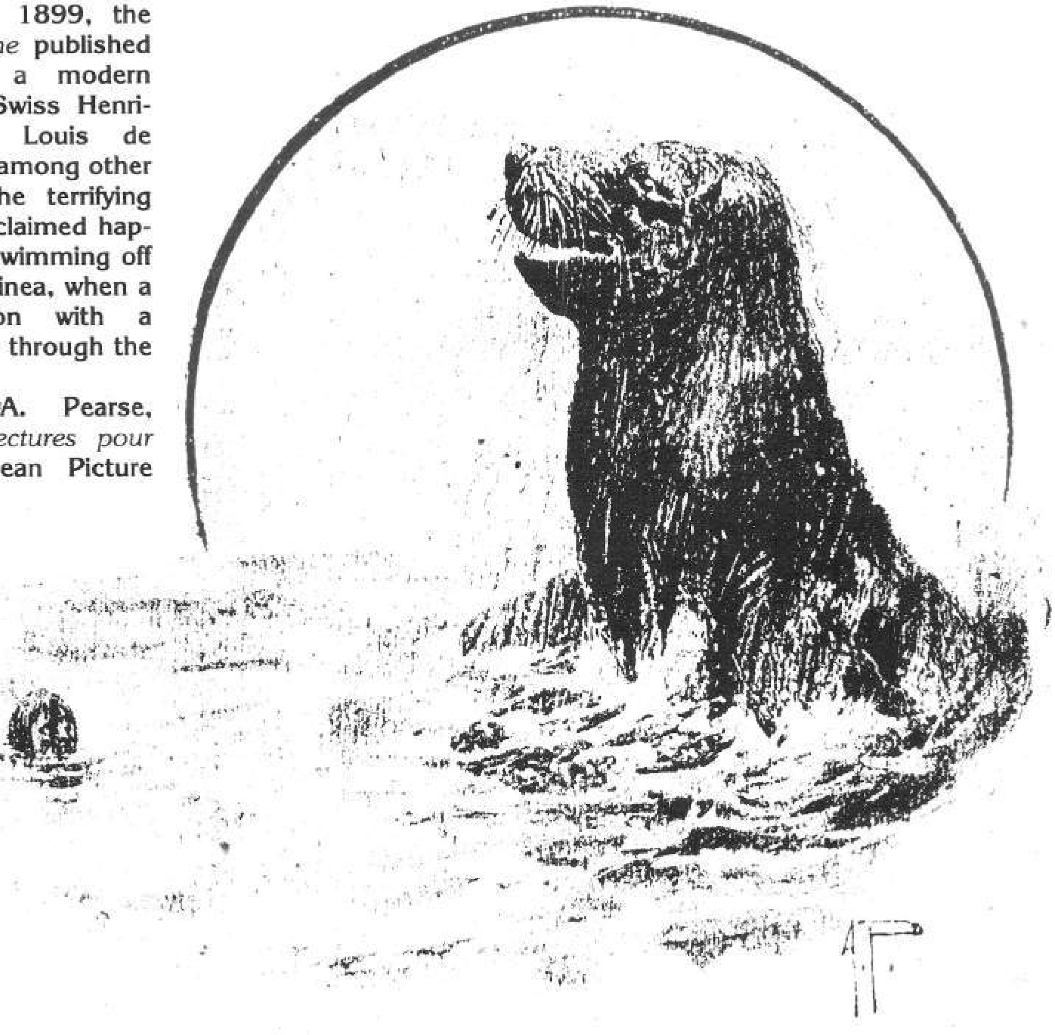
[12] ■ See Chapter 4, Section 1.

[13] ■ A group of mammals which includes seals, sea-lions and walruses.

We seem to be dealing with three levels here: initially, there is the question of the real identity of the little creature; then problems of the two interpretations of it, as a merboy by the White, and as a god of the lake by the Amerindian woman. The creature may have been a seal. An observation cited by Henry Lee may help: he was once on a yacht off the Hook of Holland when one of his companions, in broad daylight, mistook a seal – in the arms-raised pose of classical merfolk – for a boy, whom, she supposed, had swam from the coast on a begging expedi-



A 'Negro Fish', from Conrad Lycosthenes, *Prodigiorum...* **(1557).** [Fortean Picture Library]



Between 1896 and 1899, the *Wide World Magazine* **published the tall tales of a modern Munchhausen, the Swiss Henri-Louis Grin (alias Louis de Rougemont), which, among other marvels, included the terrifying moment the author claimed happened to him while swimming off the coast of New Guinea, when a 20-foot-long sea-lion with a "flowing** *mane***" burst through the surface close to him.**

Drawing by A. Pearse, reproduced from *Lectures pour tous* **(1899).** [Fortean Picture Library] tion. This significant conclusion is without doubt due to the extended hand-like fore-flippers giving the impression of a begging gesture. [15]

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[14] *Canadian Magazine* May 1824. See also: R.S. Lambert 1955.

Venant's Saint-Germain little merboy was perceived in the poor but eminently mythogenic conditions of twilight, in which shadows can model a flipper into an extended 'arm', change the grey colour of a seal into "brownish hue", and metamorphose a sparse and wet fur seen from a distance into "woolly hair". But I suggest that the transformation of the bizarre creature into a negro merboy may have proceeded from a *later* elaboration. Venant saw the 'fish-boy' in 1781 but did not report it until 1812, when he made a sworn deposition before the judges of the Court of the King's Bench in Montreal. This judicial testimony demonstrates the sincerity of his statement, but cannot be understood as validation of his interpretation of it, because, as in the case of Captain von Ferry [16], too much time had elapsed between incident and statement – in Venant's case nearly 30 years – for us to accept his account at face value.

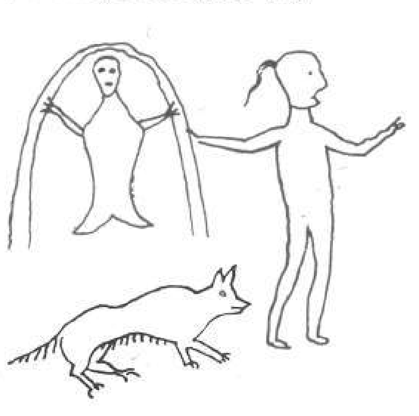
"CONFORMS TO A TYPE"
HARRIET RITVO, M.D. FOSTER:
'THE CLASSIFICATORY IMAGINATION'

Von Ferry and Venant Saint-Germain, like Father Nicolas, considered sea-monsters to be part of the secular world-view. The Jesuit placed the Old Man of the Sea among the fauna of the New France; Venant tried the same thing through the Montreal court. His negro sea-boy was not an isolated sighting, but conforms to a *type*, like the bearded triton. In 1814 – two years after Venant's deposition – two Scottish fishermen claimed to have seen a negroid merman near Portgordon, on the Banff coast. [17]

The merchant from Repentigny had projected onto the unidentified animal in Lake Superior details belonging to sea folklore; for him, the merfolk were to be classed as game which can be shot, like the fur animals he was trading. In sharp contrast to this European world-view was that of the Amerindian woman for whom the tiny creature was a supernatural being, the powerful master of the lake, a water-god. Even today, the Ojibwa of Lake Superior believed in the *Maymaygwayshi*, merfolk with children's bodies and hairy faces. Such water-pygmies are believe to produce their own rock paintings, raising their arms out of the water to leave red hand-prints on the rocks. Some pictographs of figures with raised arms have been interpreted as representations of the *Maymaygwayshi*. [18] So Venant's fish-boy is not that far removed from such fabulous beings; both in size, form and gesture (arm raised) it corresponds to the legendary *Maymaygwayshi*.

We need not conclude that Venant Saint-Germain believed he saw a *Maymaygwayshi*; it seems more likely that the unidentified – perhaps seal-like – animal produced in the Canadian trader and the Amerindian woman two separate identifications, each corresponding to a prevailing collective belief. Although Venant did not shoot the water-child, he succeeded in giving to the episode the coherency which appeals to modern readers, the status of a sworn affidavit. The tale of the monster of the Richelieu River was included in a 'Natural history', the adventure of the lake-child in a legal statement; the former under the protection of the State and the latter by goddess Nature. Yet both are made from the stuff of dreams.

THE TEXTUAL BIAS OF WESTERN THOUGHT
— PER DERRIDA, LATOUR



A pictograph of a fish-tailed 'mermaid', recorded by H.R. Schoolcraft, ***The American Indians*** **(1851 A). Selwyn Dewdney records the site as "unlocated" (Dewdney & Kidd 1967 [1962]).** [Fortean Picture Library]

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15 ■ As quoted in R. Carrington 1957, p19.

16 ■ See Introduction, p15ff.

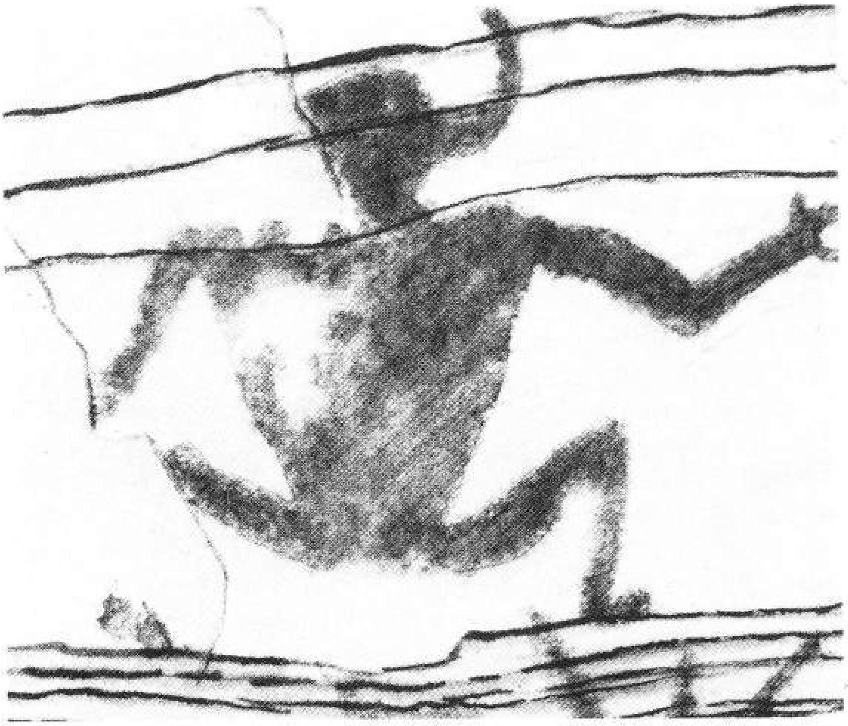
17 ■ R.M. Robertson 1961, p155. The merman had "a swarthy face, short greenish-grey *curly* hair ... a flat nose and a large mouth..."

In about 1667, an Englishman, Thomas Glover, was surprised by an unidentified pinniped while alone in a boat on the Rappahannoc River, Virginia. The description he gave – in *Philosophical Transactions*, vol 11, 1700 (p566, vol 3, of the abridged series, 1731) – because it is a straightforward observation, devoid of references to traditional mermen – allows us to use it for comparison..

Glover heard "a great rushing and flashing of water," and then saw near him "a most prodigious creature, much resembling a man, standing right up in the water, with his head, neck, shoulders, breast and waist to the cubits of his arms above water. His skin was tawny, *much like that of an Indian*; his head pyramidal and sleek without hair; his eyes large and black, and so were his eyebrows; his mouth very wide, with a broad, black streak on the upper lip, turning upwards at each end like mustachios; his countenance grim and terrible." After gazing at Glover, the animal plunged, revealing a tail "like the tail of a fish".

18 ■ S. Dewdney and K.E. Kidd 1967 [1962]. See illustration.

Dewdney translates "*Maymaygwayshi*" as "Rock medicine man", but notes various other meanings: "fairy", "ghost", "spirit", "merman" and even "monkey". These entities were believed to be "only two or three feet high" and to live behind or inside waterside rocks. (Dewdney & Kidd pp13–14.)



Selwyn Dewdney's painting of the pictograph of a *Maymaygwayshi* on a ledge above the Nipigon River. From Dewdney & Kidd, *Indian rock paintings of the Great Lakes* **(1967 [1962])** [Courtesy of the University of Toronto Press ©]

FABULOUS CREATURES ON THE DISSECTING TABLE

The whole process of concretizing, the search for exhibits, and the drawings, all these assertive means coagulated soft beliefs and indefinite sightings into hardened plausibility. From the erudition of the 17th century to modern cryptozoology, a scientific study or description is a decisive factor in converting unbelievable legends into quite credible guesses. The selection of data, the dissection of fabulous beings and the admission of their more 'reasonable' elements, gave to purely imaginary creations the solidity of scientific models.

ADORNO
"PSEUDO-CONCRETENESS"

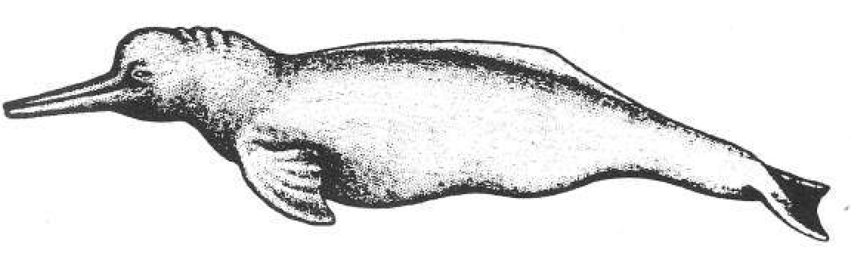
Masters of such methods were the Jesuits. Their scope was the strengthening of tradition. The dragon, Leviathan, and the unicorn were attested by the Bible and the Church Fathers, and therefore their quest for knowledge was largely apologetical. To prove the reality of the dragon was to gain a victory for the authority of the Church over the doubts of heretics and libertines. Small wonder, then, that amongst the apostles of dragons and mermaids we find a great number of Jesuits, of whom special mention must be made of Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680), who gave a seal of learned approval to a whole fantastic zoo of two-footed snakes and bat-winged dragons. The integration of the "sea monster" of the Richelieu River into a work of natural history, therefore, had an ideological background. Father Nicolas was not only a religious missionary among the heathen, he was also the advocate of Christian science, asserting tradition through the discovery of a weird carcass.

The Jesuits of Hispanic America were the pioneers of such quests. A long time before the shooting of the Canadian fishman, colleagues of Louis Nicolas had described, in a scholarly way, the river- and sea-dwelling *Igpupiara* ("dweller in the water") of Brazil. Father Fernãõ Cardim explained, in his *Trato do Terra e Gente do Brasil* (1585), that these "mermen" can only be distinguished from humans by their deep sunken eyes. Their females are beautiful, with long hair. They kill men by gripping the body of their prey in a vice-like embrace. When they feel that their victim is dead, they moan mournfully. They leave their mark on the corpses, eating only the eyes, nose, tips of toes and fingers, and the genitals. Bodies mutilated in this way are found on the beaches. **[19]**

In 1554, a widely reported incident occurred which merited a whole chapter in Pero de Magalhanes de Gandavo's *History of the province of Sancta Cruz* (1575). On the coast of Sam Vicente [sic], the son of a local Portuguese captain was alarmed by the cries of a female Amerindian slave which drew his attention to an "enormous mass" wandering along the beach. Interpreting it as a "sea-monster", the young man, armed with a sword, blocked its path to the sea. Frustrated, "the monster raised itself erect like a man, supporting itself on its tail fin." Seizing the opportunity, the youth, Baltasar Ferreira, plunged his sword into its belly. The wounded beast tried to tear Ferreira to pieces "with its teeth and claws", but as more natives rushed to help the combat was quickly finished. The next day, the monster was publicly exposed. According to Magalhanes de Gandavo its body was covered with hair, "and on its muzzle it had long hairs similar to whiskers." He concludes by noting that "Indians in this land call it *Hipupiara*, that is to say 'water demon'. Such creatures have been seen in the same area before, but rarely." **[20]**

The incident was preserved for posterity in a fascinating German engraving, published in Augsburg in 1559 [see illustration opposite]. This broadsheet shows the "sea-wonder" (*"Meerwunder"*) as a *giant* with a seal-like head adorned with tufts of whiskers. The unknown artist has tried to convey the treble nature of the creature through the form of various appendages: as a *sea-beast* it has a pinniped's muzzle; as a *humanoid monster* it has long arms and hands; and as a hermaphrodite *demon* it displays devilish bird-claws and a penis as well as breasts. The drawing is testimony to the wavering status of monsters in the 16th century: are they hell-spawns or natural oddities?

If we return to the local legend of the *Igpupiara*, we discover that under this broad concept many real animals seem to lend their shapes and habits. The Igpupiara is a *sea mammal*. One type corresponds to the Amazonian dolphin (*Inia geoffroyensis*) with its long and *hairy* beak. The Burgundian clergyman Jean de Léry (1534–1613) took part in the colonial enterprises of De Villegagnon in Brazil between 1556 and 1558.



A drawing of the fresh water dolphin *Inia geoffroyensis*, also known as the *Boutu* (or *Boto*), a specific adaptation to the Amazon river complex; from Ivan Sanderson, *Follow the whale* (1958).

According to Sanderson (p365ff), the Boutu has an average length of between six and seven feet, and has large flippers upon which it can "raise its forequarters off the ground when completely out of the water."

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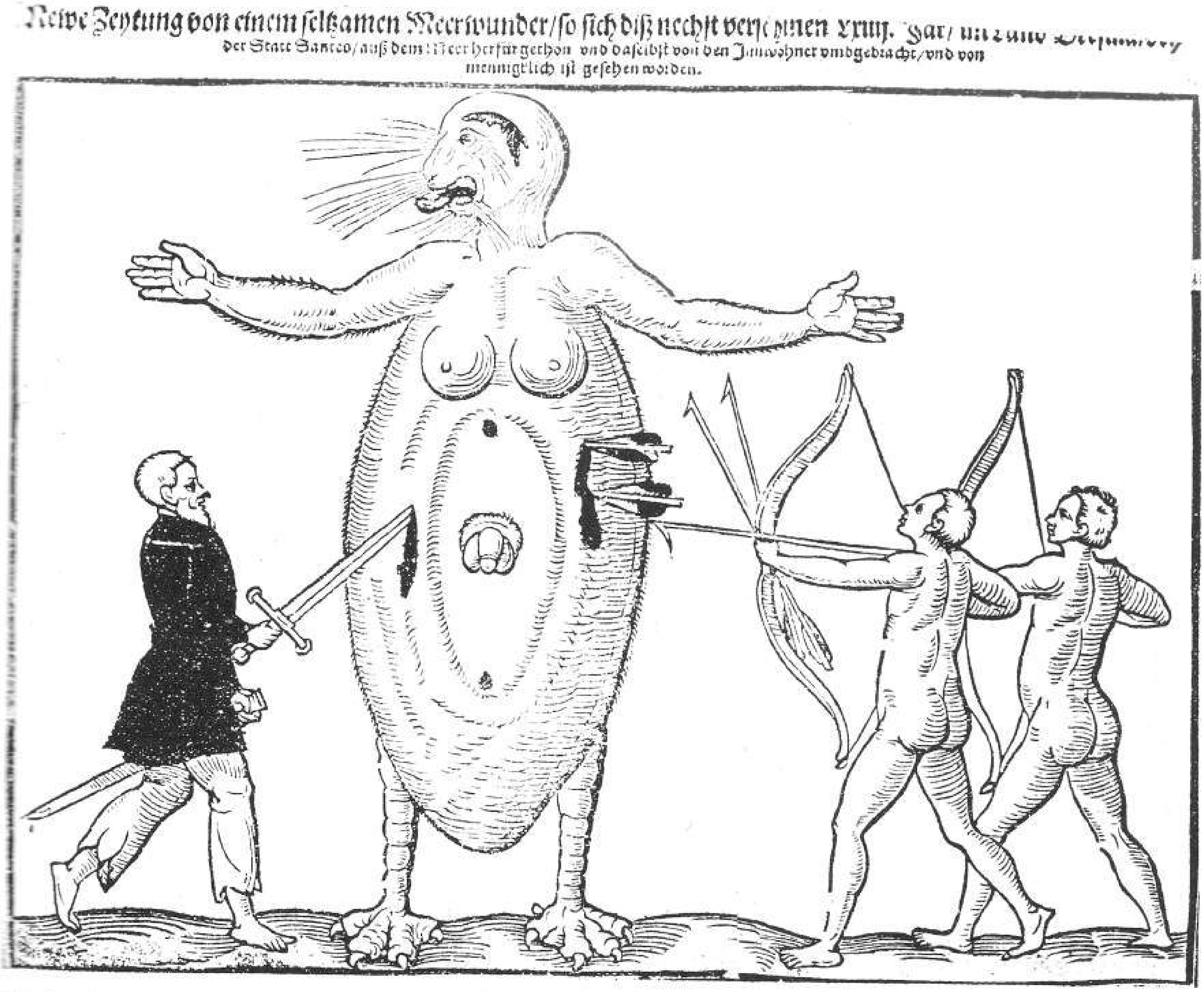
19 ■ Luis da Camara-Cascudo, 'Los mitos de las aguas del Brasil,' in *Anuario de la Sociedad Folklorica de Mexico*, vol 5, 1945, pp14–15.

20 ■ P. de Magalhanes de Gandavo 1837 [1576].


Newe Zeytung von einem ſeltzamen Meerwunder/ſo ſich diß nechſt verg[illegible]nen xxiiij. Jar/ [illegible]
der Statt Santco/ auß dem Meer herfür gethon vnd daſelbſt von den Jnnwohner vmbgebracht/vnd von
menniglich iſt geſehen worden.

The battle between Baltasar Ferreira and the ***Igpupiara*****, as represented in a German broadsheet from Augsburg (1559).** [Fortean Picture Library]

In 1578 de Léry published an account of this failed attempt to found the "Antarctic France", and from the chapter on Brazilian fauna we extract the story of an Amerindian fishing at sea. A sea-creature burst from the water close by and put a "fin" into his boat. The terrified native chopped it off and found "it had five fingers, like a human hand". Then the "fish" showed its head and the native saw a human face. [21]

Doubtless, the episode referred to the *Igpupiara*, even if the motif of the mutilated mermaid was well-known in Europe and often used to substantiate the numerous "mermaid's hands" formerly kept in the 'Cabinet of Curiosities' of scholars and collectors. The Amazonian dolphin has a pectoral flipper showing signs of five digits, and under the influence of a marine folklore it could be taken for a humanoid hand. But how can one confuse the 'smiling' beaked face of the dolphin with a human one? That one can – and furthermore, that Europeans have done – is shown by the following text from another Jesuit, Father Simon de Vasconcelos (1597–1616). He tells us that he saw, with his own eyes, *Igpupiara* skeletons heaped on the sea-shore: "I saw their skulls, and they offered no differences to those of men and women, except for a hole in the back of the head, through which they breathe." [22]

This aperture is obviously the blow-hole of a dolphin. If a learned Jesuit, scrutinizing a dolphin's skull at close quarters, can see "no differences" to that of a human, then we must be extremely cautious with colonial descriptions and reports of sea-monsters. When travellers used comparisons with the known in their attempts to describe the unknown, they used familiar animals. These comparisons were not intended to be fully accurate, but only broad *approximations* and this hazy description was influenced by prevailing myths. Father Vasconcelos, influenced by the tales of the water-humanoids, sees in the dolphin's skull only such features that look roughly human.

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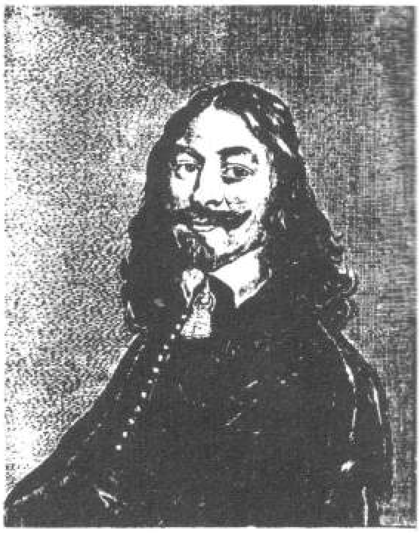
[21] ■ J. de Lery 1580, p169.

[22] ■ Cited by Luis da Camara-Cascudo, 'Los mitos de las aguas del Brasil,' in *Annuario de la Sociedad Folklorica de Mexico*, vol 5, 1945, p15.



Thomas Bartholin in 1651; from his *Anatomia... tertium reformata* **(1651).** [Fortean Picture Library]

The myth of the *Igpupiara* also shaped the interpretation of the native's encounter given to Jean de Léry and directs the Jesuit's analysis. We have seen that the description of the *Igpupiara* is extremely sketchy; one can hardly differentiate it from a human. Therefore the presence of such fabulous creatures is established through experiences with real animals presenting some likeness to men. Legends are dynamic; they have a will to express themselves in daily life. This energy helps to confuse similarity and identity. A dolphin's fin is not a human hand, but the anecdote of the severed appendage illustrates beautifully the deep desire to minimise their differences, to touch the "hand" of a merman and establish its weird likeness to ourselves.

Similarly, Father Vasconcelos became a modern Doubting Thomas who was converted to belief in the *Igpupiara* after handling "their" skulls. However, the "materializing" of the *Igpupiara* as a cetacean cannot account for all their animalic characteristics. One cannot readily imagine a dolphin, however adventurous, frolicking on a beach and rearing up on its tail. The *Igpupiara*, fought by Baltasar Ferreira, corresponds more likely to a pinniped, perhaps a powerful bull sea-lion. A male of this species can reach nine feet (3m) high and will fight back energetically if attacked. We know that specimens of the Patagonian herds have been seen as far north as the Rio de la Plata, and the Sam Vicente "sea-monster" may have been one of these creatures driven by currents up to the Brazilian coast. [23]

At the level of its embodiment, the legend of the *Igpupiara* is therefore a compound of cetacean and pinnipedean features. One wonders if the stories of the deadly embrace of the creature could not be an objectification of the observations of a favourite posture of the Amazonian manatee (*Trichetus inunguis*), with front flippers in the 'arms raised' attitude.

The last piece of the *Igpupiara* case history is the best one, because it gives to this Brazilian merman a quasi-scientific status. In 1654, the great Danish anatomist, Thomas Bartholin, published a selection of his more curious dissections. Case 11 contains his analysis of two strange exhibits, ornaments from his Cabinet of Curiosities: a merman's hand and rib. [24] Merchants of the Dutch West Indies Company had allegedly captured a fish-man off the Brazilian coast, which they brought to Leyden where Pieter Pauw (1564–1617), superintendent of the anatomical theatre, dissected it. The director of the West Indies Company, Johannes de Laet, was present. [25]

The 'merman' had a human head and breast, but the lower

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23 ■ The allusion, by de Magalhanes, to other "rare" observations "in the same area" may refer to occasional apparitions of sea-lions.

24 ■ T. Bartholin 1654, pp186–191. See also: Introduction p18.

25 ■ Bartholin's friend, Johannes de Laet, mentioned the *Igpupiara* in his *Novus orbis* (1640 [1633], p508), adding that the Amerindians fear this monster so much that they die by sheer fright.

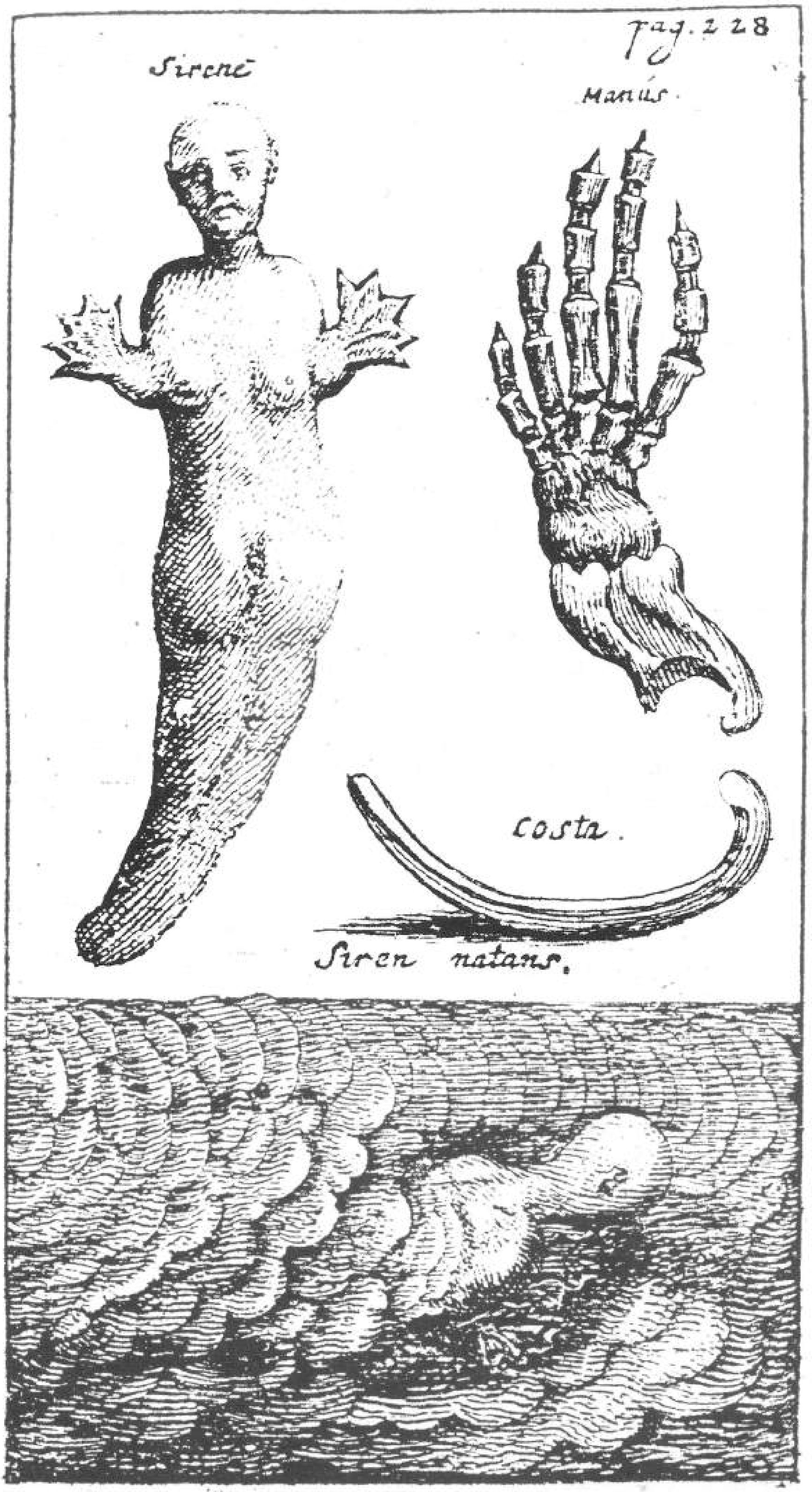
Dutchmen of the 17th century – the "Golden Century" (*"de Gouden Eeuw"*) of the Netherlands – were interested in the problem of Bartholin's merman as an aspect of their expanding natural knowledge. There is a page on the *Igpupiara* in the *Rerum in Brasilia gestarum historia* (1659 [1647], p390) of the poet-theologist Gaspard van Baerle (1584–1648).

→ THE DRAWING
AS IMMUTABLE MOBILE :

LATOUR – THE PRINT DOCUMENTS
MOBILITY [AS OPPOSED TO ORAL STORYTELLING]
GRANTS IT AUTHORITY

The scientific legitimisation of legend: a mermaid's anatomy and 'objective' proofs. The hand and rib of a siren; from Thomas Bartholin's *Ungewöhnliche anatomische geschichte* **(1675).**

[Fortean Picture Library]



part of its body was a shapeless mass of flesh without any sign of a tail. De Laet took the hand and ribs and gave them to his friend, Thomas Bartholin. In his treatise, Bartholin scrutinizes the evidence as an anatomist, observing that the knuckle bones were stronger than human ones, and that the fingers were united by a membrane like the webbed foot of a goose. The rib is longer than its human equivalent. Bartholin concludes that the Brazilian merman is a specific human adaptation to sea life. If one can find a "sea-calf" and a "sea-horse" in the boundless ocean, then

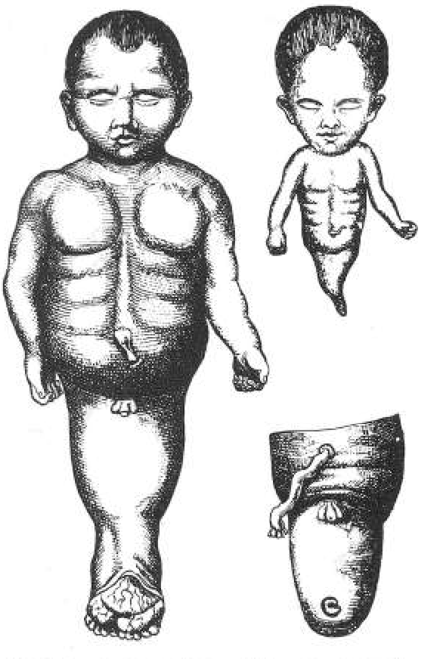
ANTICIPATES BY 100 YEARS
THE LOGIC AND VISUAL
FORM OF CUVIERS
COMPARATIVE ANATOMY

why not a sea-humanoid? [**26**]

The *Igpupiara* had assumed a progressive naturalization: it had been killed and exhibited; its skulls manipulated; and now it had been scientifically dissected in one of the most illustrious centres of anatomical study, Leyden. Finally, Bartholin, the great scientist – long before Lamarck – interprets them as living beings, morphologically adapted to their habitat. The next step is to accommodate the *Igpupiara* relics from prehistory.

The famous 1954 movie, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, was allegedly inspired by native legends about a "half-man half-fish creature dwelling in the upper reaches of the Amazon". [**27**] But Bartholin's Brazilian merman was already a creature of science-fiction. The Dane had injected this conjectural being with his anatomical knowledge, giving it a superior realism. His engraving of the strange bald mummy-like humanoid was copied and reproduced throughout Europe.

What exactly was the carcase dissected at Leyden? Georg Gruber has compared it with a type of human teratology, the 'sirenoids' or spindle-shaped embryos [**28**] which are, still today, displayed in fairground side-shows as "true mermaids". It is likely we will never know the answer.



Some examples of so-called 'sirenoids', showing the fusion of under-developed lower limbs; from Gould & Pyle's *Curiosities and anomalies of medicine* **(1896).** [Fortean Picture Library]

The water-folk faith has persisted in the Amazon region, given substance by the appearances of the dolphin, the "Boto". Luis da Camara Cascudo quotes, from a book published in 1942, the "recent" story of a mother presenting her baby at a hospital. When asked to name the father, she answered: "He has none. He is the son of the 'Boto'." [**29**] More recently (8 May 1984), the *Weekly World News* presented as a factual account the story of the attempted seduction of an Amazonian fisherman, Jorge Reba, by a mermaid with a *porpoise's* tail. [**30**] And in a West German TV show, Jacques Cousteau reported his interview of an old Peruvian fisherman who told him how he was once tempted by an alluring girl wearing only a bra and panties. It was a dolphin in disguise. A Brazilian assured Cousteau that such relationships sometimes produce offspring which look human but have a beak and blowholes. [**31**]

The saga of the Igpupiara is a long and fascinating one. From the green depths of Brazilian rivers to the dissection tables of Holland its story is an example of the formation of colonial monsters. Firstly, descriptions of a native monster reaches the explorers and traders. They are the first to accomodate the indigenous beliefs to European requirements, and soon a colonial resident will claim to have *seen* the creature. His observation is already shaped by a mixed folklore in the making. Then, relics of an unidentified animal, killed by the Europeans, are interpreted as the remains of the mysterious beast. A learned man will describe it, and an artist will attempt a reconstruction for a scholarly treatise. Fragments of its body will be scattered among the most illustrious collections of marvels. The rare creature will be anatomized and analysed in Latin. A compiler will translate and popularize it in a book full of lurid engravings, placing it between a story about cannibals and a horrible shipwreck. New candidates for colonial adventures will set out to find the monster, and a new sedimentation of alleged sightings will accumulate.

THE HISTORICAL MATERIALISM RECAPITULATED IN MONSTER TRADITIONS

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26 ■ T. Bartholin 1654, pp186–191.

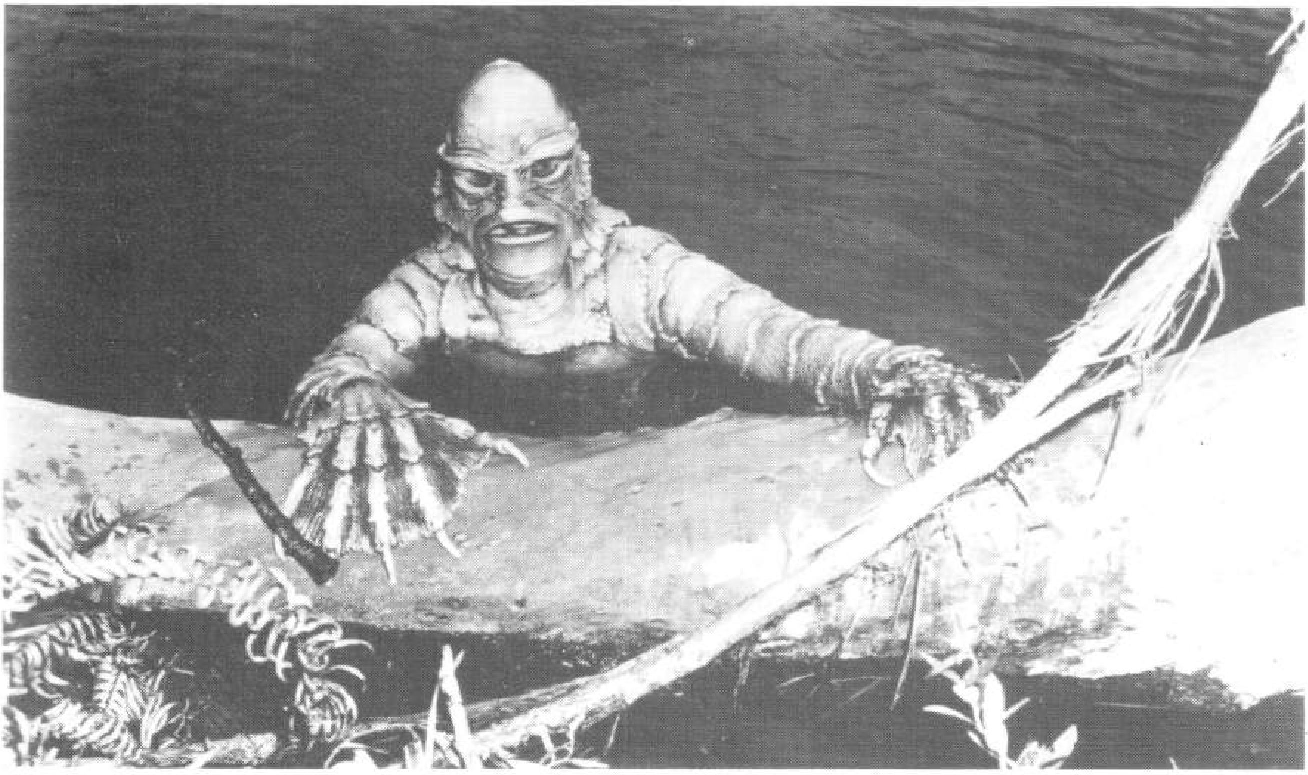
27 ■ B. Warren 1982, p168.
In a curious correspondence across the centuries, the zoological adventurers are also alerted the the existence of their quarry by the discovery of a preserved, hand —see illustrations on facing page.

28 ■ Georg B. Gruber, 'Historisches und Aktuelles über das Sirenen-Problem in der Medizin', in *Nova Acta Leopoldina Abhandlungen*, Neue-Folge (Leipzig-Barth) 1955, N° 117, p99.

29 ■ Luis da Camara-Cascudo, 'Los mitos de las aguas del Brasil,' in *Annuario de la Sociedad Folklorica de Mexico*, vol 5, 1945, p26.

30 ■ Reported in *Fortean Times* N° 43 (1985) p34.

31 ■ Cousteau on mythical dolphins: see Ulrich Magin's newsletter on water-monster sightings, *Bilk Magazine* (Stuhlbruderhofstr 4, 6704 Mutterstadt, W. Germany), N° 4, September 1985 .



Top: **The creature from the Black Lagoon, from the 1954 film of the same name.** Bottom: **In the same film, biologists examine the preserved hand of one of the Amazonian amphibious humanoids.** [© United Artists]

The original mythical monster has been progressively covered over with an ideological crust of pretended facticity. This hardened layer will resist any critical investigation, because the new monsters are adapted to the European mind. Water-demons transformed into *Homo aquaticus* and spirit-snakes metamorphosed into dinosaurs are all assembled from the same stuff: the plausible dreams of colonial folklore.

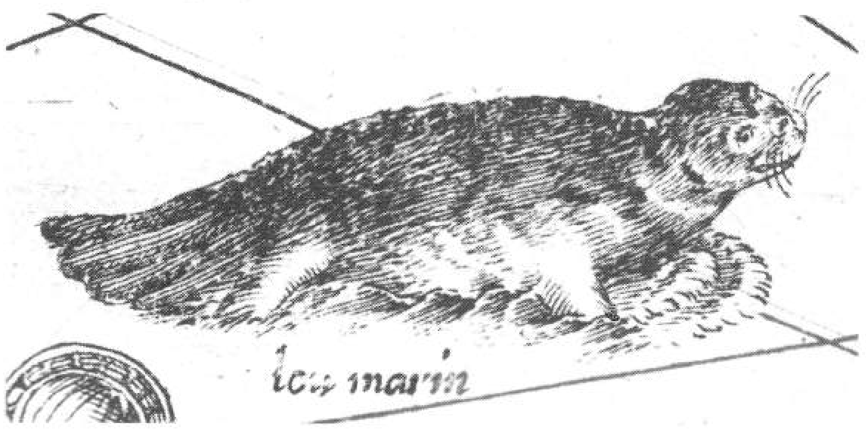
THE TOOTH OF A GOD

The more enduring legends are those preserved in formalin or stored in dusty closets. Another passage from Father Louis Nicolas will illustrate this beautifully. In Chapter eight of his *Natural history* manuscript, under the heading 'Amphibious animals', the missionary describes the terrible "sea-wolf or sea-tiger", with "tiger's eyes", "frightful whiskers", and its skin "all speckled, like a tiger's". **[32]**

This awesome creature is very likely the grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus fabricius*) which can still be found in the Saint-Lawrence Gulf today. **[33]** Later on, Nicolas adds that "sea-tigers" are aplenty around the Madeleine Islands in the Gulf, which they share with animals he cannot recognize and which "are prodigiously big, with tusks like elephants." **[34]** This remark is important, considering what follows. Louis Nicolas has no knowledge of the walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus*), yet such animals were abundant among the islands of the Saint-Lawrence until the 18th century. The locale he mentions corresponds with what we know from other studies: Cartier saw walruses on Brion Island in the Madeleine group in 1535; and a friend of Richard Hakluyt sent him a walrus tusk from the same area. **[35]**

With this ignorance of the walrus on the part of Father Nicolas in mind, let us return to his manuscript. Just after the passage about the "sea-tigers", he tells us of "the evil genius called in the savage tongue *Matchi-manitou*, or otherwise *Mitchipichi*." He says this creature is the "biggest" of the four-footed beasts he had already described. Its 18-foot-long body is wholly covered "with a hairy skin like that of the sea-tiger; it has four feet like the beaver, and a tail similar to a beaver's. Its head seems disproportionately big when compared to the rest of its body, and most extraordinarily, its teeth are monstrous, especially the two in the upper jaw which reach two feet long." Nicolas adds that such tusks are "sharp-pointed and as beautiful as fine ivory." One can see this "monster" only in the vicinity of some islands in the gulf of Saint-Lawrence. Besides, "the savages that inhabit the shores of the Great Lakes *appear to have seen them lying on those shores*." One Amerindian from the Ottawa nation, who had killed one of these creatures, gave to Father Nicolas "a tooth of this beast that he called *Michipichi*." Nicolas, in turn, gave this "rare" present to the administrator of New France. **[36]**

IMMUTABLE MOBILE



A naturalistic rendering of a *loup marin* or sea-wolf; from Samuel de Champlain's 1612 map of New France.

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32 ■ L. Nicolas, *Histoire naturelle*.. c.1675, folios 119–120.

33 ■ J.E. King 1964, p38.

According to William F. Ganong the phrase *"Loup Marin"* or "sea-wolf" was "applied by the early voyagers to seals generally". ('The identity of the animals and plants mentioned by the early voyagers to Eastern Canada and Newfoundland', in *Proceedings and Transactions* of the Royal Society of Canada, 3rd Series, vol 3, Section 2 (Ottawa 1910) p223.)

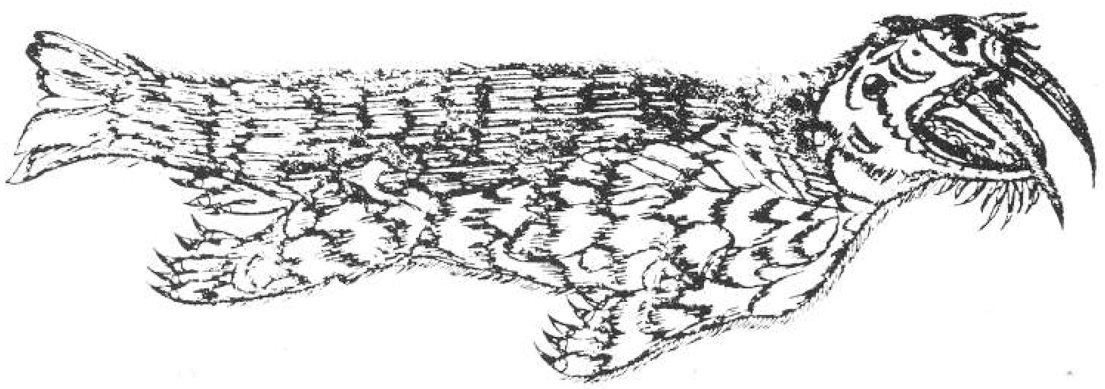
See illustration.

Two kinds of seals live in the Saint-Lawrence: the Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*), and the Common Seal (*Phoca vitulina*), and Father Nicolas' descriptions seems to correspond to the Grey Seal. (F-M. Gagnon and D. Petel 1986, p25.)

34 ■ L. Nicolas, *Histoire naturelle*... c.1675, folio 120.

35 ■ F-M. Gagnon and D. Petel 1986, p30.

36 ■ L. Nicolas, *Histoire naturelle*... c.1675, folios 122–123.



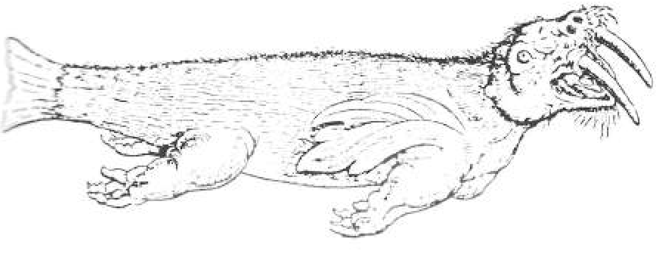
Mishipizhiw, **the Amerindian water-god, according to Louis Nicolas'** *Natural history...* **(c1675).** [© Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris].

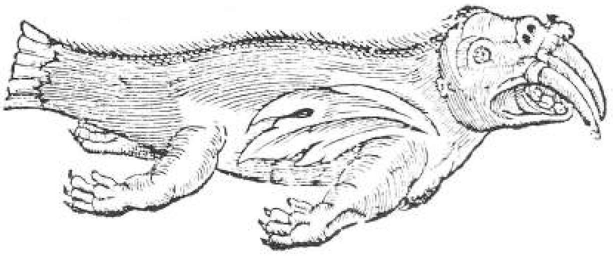
Now, if we turn to the *Codex Canadiensis*, we see a garbled rendering of a walrus [see illustration], with the commentary: "Michipichik, or the water-god according to the Americans." The Jesuit has simply reproduced the erroneous representation of the walrus borrowed by Ambrose Paré (1585) from Conrad Gesner (1560). It is an unlikely mammal with a fish-tail and four limbs armed with strong claws. Not knowing of the real walrus, Father Nicolas tried to give his readers a graphic representation of its zoological form and inadvertently came closer to the Amerindians' own description of their "water-god".

Now the fascinating text from Nicolas' *Natural history* leads us towards interesting channels of thought. We have seen, in the preceding chapter, that the name *Mishipizhiw* means "Great Lynx", even if for the Ojibwa Indians this fearful water-god can manifest itself as a horned *serpent*. According to Selwyn Dewdney, *Mishipizhiw* is also identified as the "underground panther", "sea-tiger" and "sea-lion". **[37]** One of the appearances of the Great Lynx was as a huge *log* across which the dead must walk. He was in fact a serpent who then writhes to make them fall off. **[38]**

Nicolas' statement corresponds partly to what we know of Amerindian beliefs. In 1667, he was with Father Claude-Jean Allouez (1620–1690) at Chagouamigon, on the south-west shore of Lake Superior. Father Allouez, as we saw in the previous chapter, fought bitterly against the native belief in *Mishipizhiw*, whom he called the "*Neptune* of the Amerindians". Father Nicolas received his walrus tusk from a member of the Ottawa nation. At that time, according to a letter written in 1710, Chagouamigon was the original centre of one of the Ottawa tribal groups, the Outaruaks, who localized the abode of *Mishipizhiw* on an *island* in Lake Superior. **[39]**

Chagouamigon was also, at the time of Father Nicolas, a great Amerindian trading "fair", where distant tribes came to





Below left: **The walrus according to Conrad Gesner,** *Icones animalium marinorum* **(1560).** [Fortean Picture Library]

Below right: **The walrus according to Ambrose Paré (1585).** [Fortean Picture Library]

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37 ■ S. Dewdney 1975, p123.

38 ■ *ibidem*, p128.

39 ■ *ibidem*, p126.

exchange their goods. [40] One can imagine that the precious walrus tusk should have appeared in such a place, bought from hunters close to the Gulf and given to him as material proof of the presence of *Mishipizhiw* in Lake Superior. Yet, what shall we do with Nicolas' affirmation that the residents of the Great Lakes had *seen* a creature which he had identified from their *description*, graphically, and without knowing it, as a walrus?

In more recent times, seals have been sighted in the Great Lakes. [41] If seals can occasionally migrate to Lake Superior, we can consider this a reinforcement of the hypothesis. We have already considered the "negro" water-boy seen by Venant Saint-Germain as a pinniped. A seal migrating from Hudson Bay, along the Albany River, would be able, via smaller linking waterways, to travel through Lake Nipigon before entering the Superior. This is especially interesting, because according to the modern Ojibwa painter, Norval Morriseau, whose grandfather was a visionary shaman, the Ojibwa used to make sacrifices to *Mishipizhiw* at a special offering rock at Lake Nipigon. Early traders adopted the same rite. [42] In a book published in 1965, Morriseau revealed that "the last offerings were made to the demi-god at Lake Nipigon about thirty years ago." [43] He thought that the huge water-cat had moved away, disturbed by the white man's motorboats and planes, as the residents around Blue-Sea Lake had suggested of their 'Horse's Head'.

One can wonder if one of the elements of this long-enduring *localization* of *Mishipizhiw* in Lake Nipigon should have something to do with casual observations of migrating pinnipeds. Other fabulous beings should also share their part of materiality. Take, for example, the travels of the 'Horse's Head' through the Gatineau River toward Blue-Sea Lake and the Baskatong Reservoir. According to one source, the common seal *was* hunted at the mouth of the Gatineau, around 1865. Not very far from the place where the Gatineau flows into the Outaouais (Ottawa) River, the latter widens into an expanse called "Lake Deschesnes", which was the location of rather sketchy sightings, in 1880, of a sort of "serpent". Due to the often remarked "snakey" appearance of moving pinnipeds, one can speculate on the role that intermittent sightings of seals may have played in strengthening the belief in fabulous water-monsters.

THE 'SKEPTIC' AND THE 'CRYPTOZOOLOGIST' PARTAKE
IN THE SAME PROCESS OF ZOOLOGICAL 'RATIONALIZATION'

However, even if pinnipeds play a part in the *Mishipizhiw* puzzle, they cannot be the *origin* of it. The mythology of the Great Lynx is not built upon blurred descriptions of pinnipeds, adventuring into the Great Lakes; rather, hypothetical seal sightings reinforce a myth which existed long before the observations. *Mishipizhiw* is a purely imaginary and *sacred* beast, with horns on its head, a long crest on its back, and its specific ornament – repeated by artists, from the anonymous rock painters of Lake Superior's Agawa Bay [44] to Norval Morriseau's vision-inspired paintings – a long and sinuous tail with which, according to Father Perrot, it whips the water into foam, producing the tempests on lakes. [45]

This precision shows us the *subjective* value of such appendages. Therefore, to interpret *Mishipizhiw* and other indigenous monsters along purely zoological lines corresponds

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[40] ■ François-Marc Gagnon, 'l'Expérience ethnographique de Louis Nicolas,' in *Recherches Amérindiennes au Québec*, vol 8, N° 4, p286.

[41] ■ For example the "huge seal with a black body about eight feet (2.5m) long" allegedly seen at Wasaga Beach on Lake Huron, in 1938. (Niagara Falls (NY) *Evening Review* 2 June 1938; and R.S. Lambert 1955, p198.

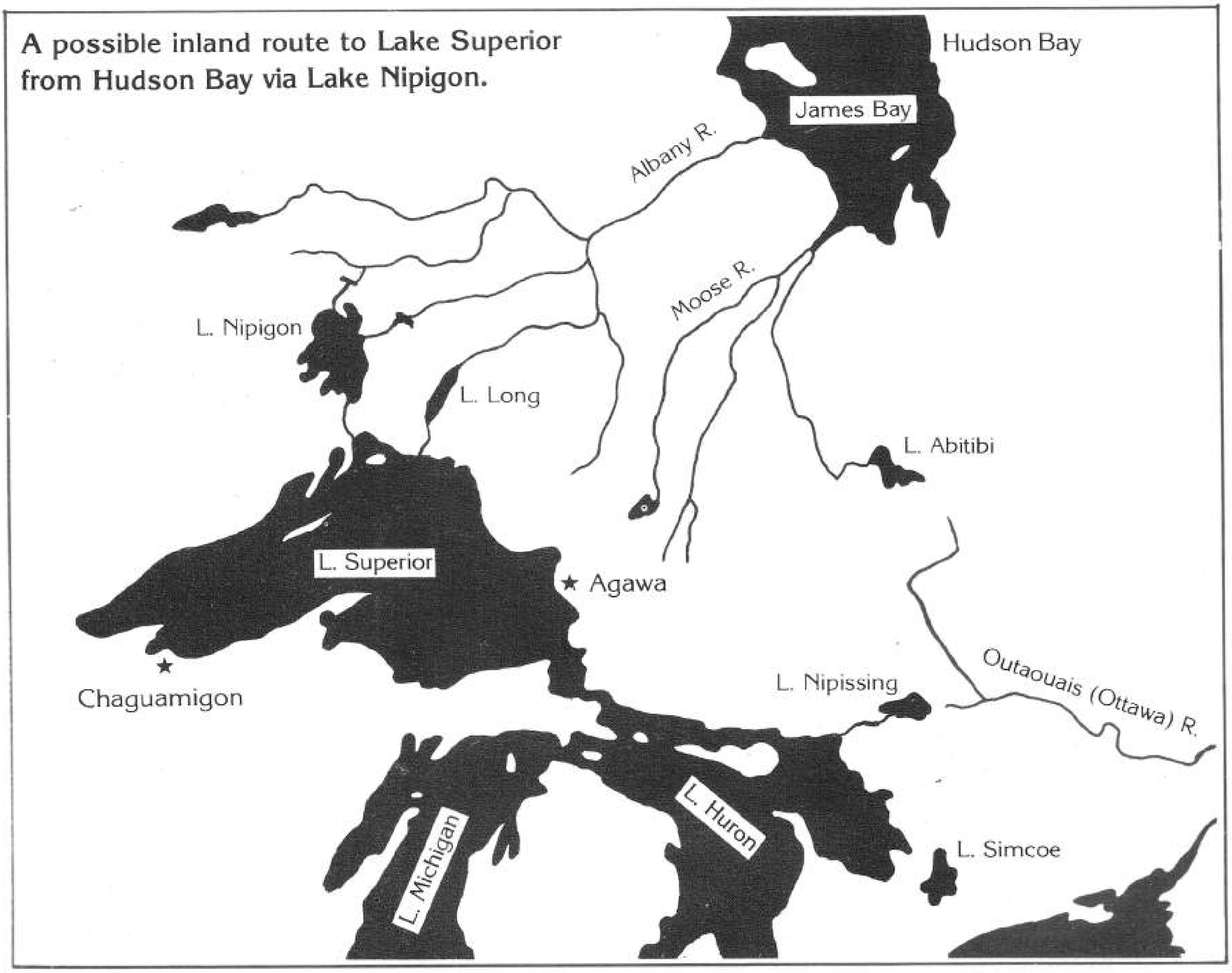
Canadian Fortean Mr X has previously expressed the theory that the water-child of Lake Superior was a seal, in his 'A mari usque ad mare', in *Fortean Times* N° 46 (1986), p46. He suggests it could have reached Lake Superior from Hudson Bay, via the great Albany River, then the Ogoki River and Lake Nipigon.

[42] ■ See Chapter 3, p167.

[43] ■ Norval Morriseau, a modern Ojibwa artist, claims the inspiration for his interpretations of traditional subjects, including the Great Lynx *Michipissi*, come directly from personal visions. (Morriseau 1977 [1965], p27ff.)

[44] ■ See Chapter 3, p167.

[45] ■ See Chapter 3, p167.



A possible inland route to Lake Superior from Hudson Bay via Lake Nipigon.

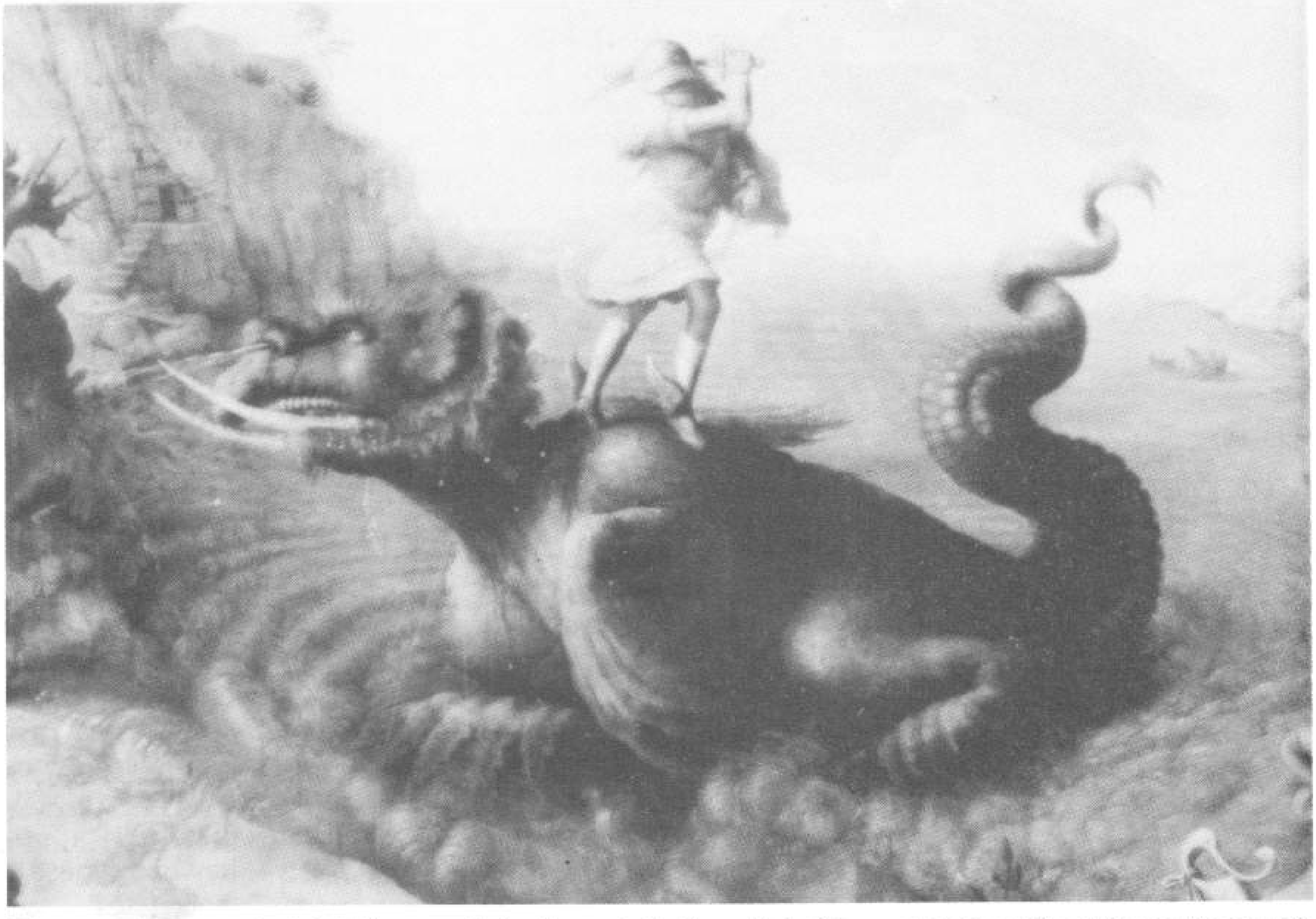
exactly to the thought-processes of the Erich von Däniken school of cosmology, to whom an Amerindian's ritual mask might become the helmet of an "ancient astronaut". Such operations are only a superficial annexation; the *content* of the indigenous representation is neglected because the speculator is mesmerized by a formal likeness to objects of modern technology. In a similar manner, cryptozoologists will use associative thought *ad nauseam*, always finding a coincidence between native monsters and animals which are extinct in textbooks because they argue from abstract analogies. Both groups have to take material out of context before they can digest it. If the ethnocentrism of modern Dänikenites and cryptozoologists is extreme, it is because they come at the end of a long road.

Louis Nicolas was heading in the same direction in the 17th century. As his own commentary demonstrates, the Jesuit knew that to the Amerindians *Mishipizhiw* was a "water-*god*", yet he chose to consider it *only as a problem of zoology*, as an unknown species of animal. Some Amerindian groups seem to have identified the Great Lynx with the walrus, but we don't really know the *modalities* of such an attribution. Was the walrus, for them, the *only* embodiment of *Mishipizhiw*, or merely a temporary form, a more possible metamorphosis of the dreaded "sea-cats"? All the swings of meaning between two cultures, various concepts of identifications, and of descriptions,

THE PROBLEM OF
ONTOLOGY IN
INTERPRETATION

prohibit us from reducing the Great Lynx to *just* a walrus. This pinniped donates its form, but that does not exhaust the multiple interpretations of the *Mishipizhiw* because they are organized by culture and not by Nature.

Confronted by a complex definition of the Great Lynx, the Jesuit cut it short. For Louis Nicolas the natives were unreasonable "children" and had therefore mistaken a "simple" freak of Nature for a supernatural being. He wants to re-establish the zoological "truth", labelling his walrus "*Mishipizhiw*" in the sense of "*a*" *Mishipizhiw*, the specimen of a whole scarce but real animal species. This very special status is incorporated into the tusk, in which he sees a "*rarity*", an object of wonder and value, worthy of the colonial administrator's Cabinet of Curiosities. The walrus' tooth is therefore the materialization of a *translation*, as well as of a *transaction*.



The sea–dragon. A detail from *Perseus and Andromeda* **by Piero di Cosimo (1462-1521).** [Bridgeman Art Library]

Di Cosimo attempts to depict the dragon menacing Andromeda as a fabulous walrus by referring to such classical sources as the Greco-Latin sea-god Phorcys, who was a pig-headed fish (see illustration on p257), and to folk traditions of monsters in remote lakes, such as the stories of the Elbst (see Chapter 5, p255).

The Renaissance was precisely the period of a revival of interest in ancient and classical themes, and painters of the period were interested in the iconography of the pagan gods. In interpreting such creatures as the sea monsters of Di Cosimo and our other illustrations from the 15th and 16th centuries it is more useful to open the art history books than those of natural history.

The extraordinary antiquity of Di Cosimo's representation demonstrates the existance of a formalist continuum through centuries without the conformity of content. A basic form may be interpreted differently – giant fish, submarine, etc – according to the extant cultural models. When a whole zoo is seen in one tiny lake my theorizing becomes more plausible than Heuvelmans', because variety of form (and thus variety of interpretation) is built in to the folk tradition to begin with.

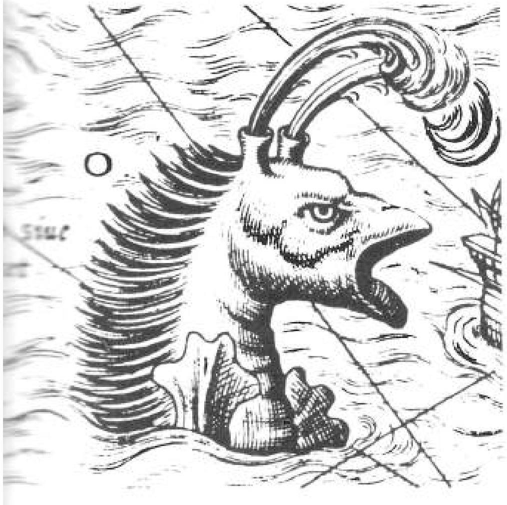
All the iconographical material in this book attempts to show the cultural patterning of imaginary lake and sea monsters.

The Amerindian who presented it to Nicolas had very probably saved it as a valuable *magical* item, like the horns of fabulous serpents, used as amulets to ensure luck during hunt and war. [**46**] In the hands of the Jesuit, the ivory tooth changes its status from *amulet* to *exhibit*; it had become materialized proof of the existence of an extraordinary creature, a source of scientific knowledge, as well as a collector's piece like a merman's hand or dragon's bone, testimony to a taste for the bizarre, the uncommon. And uncommon things should belong to exceptional men, such as an administrator. [**47**]

At the same time as Louis Nicolas believed he had discovered a new animal species, the walrus was massively hunted on Canadian shores. He had been deluded by his own ignorance and by the association of the walrus with a water-god, indigenous belief offering to the walrus some of the mystery of the sacred *Mishipizhiw*. Like Father Vasconselos with dolphin's skull in hand and intellectualizing it as the head of a monster, Louis Nicolas, trying to colonialize the Amerindian belief by transforming suggestion into science, had interpreted a common occurrence as a cryptic one.

Having integrated the Water Lynx into the European ken, the Jesuit logically attempted to recuperate its close relative, the Great Serpent with its crested back. The "*Kichikinebik*" (Great Serpent), also called "*Manitoukinebik*", also finds a place in his hospitable *Natural history*: "They are very strong, run swiftly on land and water, devouring all that they can catch. *This snake* is a *devil*, a *spirit*, say the savages, so strong and so big that it can swallow a whole buffalo, circling itself around... its back is protected by several long spines." [**48**]

Following in the tracks of the mermaid and the unicorn, the fabulous beings of North America found their places in the treatises of Natural History.



This impressive 'sea-horse', from Olaus Magnus' influential *Carta marina* (1539), was given the legend "Pistrum siue Phiset".

Although Olaus has given the monster stereotypical attributes of the legendary sea-horse, he also gives us clues to its possible identity. Firstly it has a characteristically cetacean spout; secondly, 'Physeter' was a widely used term for a spouting sperm whale. [Fortean Picture Library]

4.4

THE RIVER-HORSE OF THE SAINT-LAWRENCE

The Saint-Lawrence Gulf was not only the primary channel of the colonization of New France, it also formed a great cauldron in which, instead of whale blubber, numerous cultures simmered, mingling their hopes and dreams. On its islands the Amerindian beliefs were first adapted by the French. We have seen how the native wild-man, the *Gugwe*, became the *Gougou* of the White settlers, the grandfather of all the ogres of the Saint-Lawrence. And before Champlain, Cartier himself had followed the footprints of a strange bipedal "beast". [1]

If the first Canadian monsters were giant humanoids, ancestors of today's *Sasquatch* (Bigfoot), the main fabulous denizens of the Gulf today are sea-serpents. The most feared of them – the creature haunting the waters around the Pointe-des-Monts lighthouse – was described as a giant *snake*, 80 feet long. It was blamed for the numerous shipwrecks and the vanishings of whole families in their bark canoes. [2] This typical

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46 ■ See Chapter 3, p182.

47 ■ On collections of curiosities gathered by colonial administrators in North America, see Christian F. Feest, 'Amérique du Nord', in W. Rubin 1987, pp86–88.

48 ■ L. Nicolas, *Histoire naturelle...* c.1675, folios 60–61.

1 ■ F-M. Gagnon and D. Petel 1986, pp132–135.

2 ■ M^{me} Fafard-Lacasse 1937, p89.

monster of sailors' folklore had not only been acclimatized by coastal people but adapted by the fishermen of the Saint-Lawrence to their own occupation. The monsters of the inland lakes of Québec correspond, on one level of interpretation, to a "big fish" and especially to a familiar species in their waters enlarged to giant proportions. The "huge pike" of Lake Memphrémagog is the equivalent of the "big grey trout" of Lake Brompton and the huge eponymous fish of Lake Maskinongé.

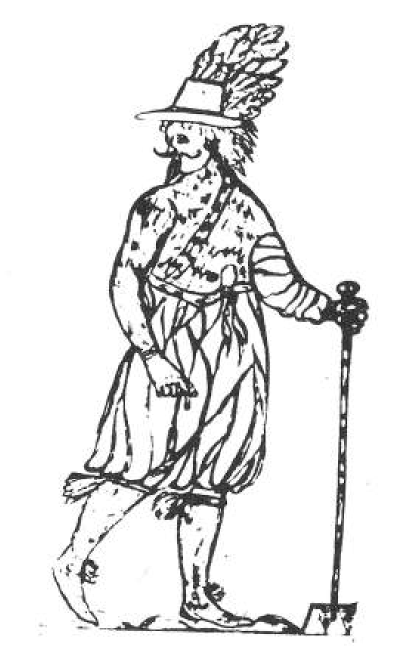
On the Saint-Lawrence, Rivière Ouelle is the centre of an eel-fishing industry, and we find that the various "big fishes" are suitably replaced by lore about monstrous eels. The fishermen here tell an interesting variant of the "living log" motif: a group of fishermen decide to sit for a moment on an unremarkable fallen tree-trunk on the shore. As they made themselves comfortable on the rough surface of the great tree and shared a drink, the tide came in and the 'log' began to move into the water. *They had been sitting on a giant eel.* [**3**]

Here the suggested ride on the great eel's back corresponds to the incident at Lake Moffat when Mr McRae's friend stepped over a "living log". [**4**] This slippery mount leads us conveniently to the last monster described in the 1675 *Natural history* by Father Louis Nicolas, the "sea-horse". He concedes it only a brief mention because it is already "very well known" from learned treatises and, he adds: *"It is the talk of everybody.* In New France one can see the sea-horse off Brion Island, on which it also lands. It frequents the river Chisedek, which lies on the north coast of the Gulf. Besides, the neighing of this sea-horse is like the ones found on the shores of the Senegal River where they are killed aplenty. I saw, myself, whole skulls, very big ones, coming from this last country, and such skulls are closely similar to those of the horse and the moose." [**5**]

The accompanying illustration [see facing page] from the *Codex* shows us a fish-tailed beast with the head of a horse and fore-limbs ending in clawed paws. The monster unfurls its long scaly tail between two large aquatic mammals, a "sea-wolf" and a "sea-tiger", thus giving a first hint of its identity. Then comes the legend: "Sea-horse which is seen in the fields on the banks of the Chisedek River which empties into the Saint-Lawrence."

What was the model for this drawing? The mention of the "Chisedek River" will be very helpful to us in finding out. During his second voyage to New France – in August 1535 – Jacques Cartier discovered a "fresh water river" up which he sailed. "Within this river are some fish shaped like *horses*, which at night take to the land and by day to the sea, as we were told by our savages; and of these fish we saw a great number in the aforesaid river." Cartier christened this waterway the "River of Horses". [**6**]

Marc Lescarbot, in his own *History of New France* (1609), quotes this account, and adds the footnote: "It is called Chischedek, from a name given by the savages." [**7**] This is the Chisedek of Louis Nicolas, interpreted by some modern commentators as the Saint-Jean River on the north shore of the Saint-Lawrence across from the island of Anticosti, and by others as the River Moisie a bit further on. [**8**] Cartier had seen Brion



Jacques Cartier – a portrait from the *Codex Canadiensis* of Louis Nicholas (c1675). [© Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris]

3 ■ R. Martin 1980, p141.

4 ■ See Chapter 1, p82.
Rides on dragons are discussed at Introduction p13ff.

5 ■ L. Nicolas, *Histoire naturelle...* c.1675, folio 123.

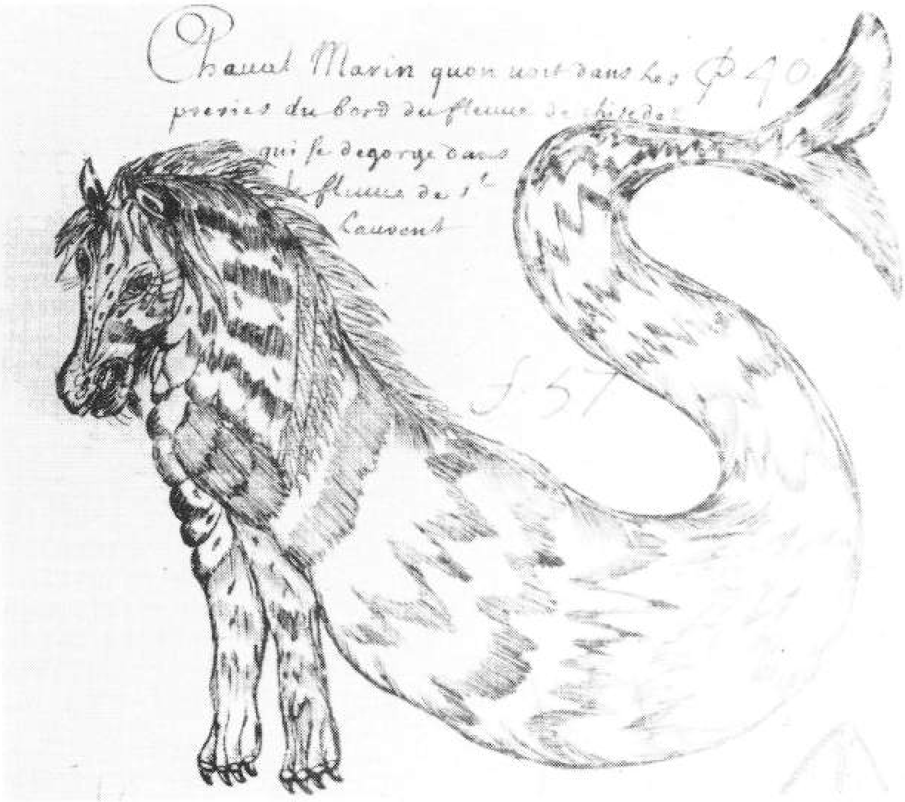
6 ■ *"Rivière des Cheveaux"* – see: Victor V. Tremblay, 'La découverte du Saguenay,' in *Saguenayensia*, Revue de la Société Historique du Saguenay, (Chicoutimi, Quebec), vol 3, N° 2 (April 1961).

Lescarbot's editor, Biggar, adds, as a footnote to Cartier's mention of "fish shaped like horses", the comment: "Doubtless the walrus (*Trichecus rosmarus*)." See: M. Lescarbot 1609, Book 3, Ch 8, in Champlain Society series, vol 7, p73.

See also: *Saguenayensia* (Chicoutimi, Quebec), April 1961.

7 ■ M. Lescarbot 1609, Book 3, Ch 8, in Champlain Society series, vol 7, p73.
See also: Victor V. Tremblay, 'Le Saguenay de Lescarbot,' in *Saguenayensia* (Chicoutimi, Quebec), vol 7, N° 1, January–February 1965.

8 ■ F-M. Gagnon and D. Petel 1986.


Chaual Marin quon uoit dans les P 40
preries du bord du fleuue de chisedec
qui se degorge dans
le fleuue de st
Laurent
157

The 'sea-horse' of the Chisedek River, according to Louis Nicolas' *Natural history...* **(c1675). [© Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris].**

Island on his first venture into the Saint-Lawrence Gulf in 1534, and noted "several huge beasts, like large *oxes*, they have two teeth in their mouthes like elephants' teeth, and live in the sea." [**9**] The two localizations of the sea-horse by Louis Nicolas – Chisedek and Brion – correspond, therefore, to the two places where Cartier saw his "fish-like horses" and "oxes", which are doubtless, from his descriptions, *walruses*. As a matter of fact, both "sea-horses" and "sea-cows" were names given to this powerful pinniped, as testified by Hassel Gerritz, who, in his accounts of the walrus hunts at Spitsbergen, records that they are named "sea-horses, as the English say, and sea-cows according to the French". [**10**]

But such names not only disguised the first discovery of the walrus, they also referred to imaginary sea-monsters. Since the time of ancient Greece, one can trace representations of a hybrid horse with two feet in front and a fish's tail behind. This is the *"Equus bipes"* type of sea-horse. [**11**] Like the fish-tailed mermaid, this creature had been integrated into the sailors' culture. Ambroise Paré says that this sea-monster with a "horse's head and mane... was *seen* in the ocean", and his representation of it is clearly the model for the drawing in the *Codex Canadiensis*. [**12**] Nicolas' drawing has reproduced its long sinuous tail, the abundant horse's mane and the fore-paws, but the webbed feet of Paré's sea-horse are replaced by feline claws. Nevertheless, the two images are nearly identical. We have seen that Nicolas, without direct knowledge of the walrus, used an engraving of it to illustrate his description of the *Mishipizhiw*, which he believed to be an unknown creature. His text in the *Natural history* is derived from Cartier's account of the "river of Horses", and wanting to give a graphic portrait of it Nicolas borrows the fabulous sea-horse from Paré. Originally, the Jesuit used a garbled but recognizable drawing of a walrus

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9 ■ H.P. Biggar 1924.

10 ■ H. Gerritz 1613.

11 ■ See L. Charbonneau-Lassay 1975 [1940], pp732–733.

12 ■ A. Paré 1971 [1573], p106. See also Chapter 3, p121ff.

to sustain the reality of the Amerindian water-god, however, by adding Paré's illustration to his text he transforms Cartier's vague description of the walrus into an apology for the fabulous *Equus bipes*. And by localizing this legendary monster at the sites mentioned by Cartier, Louis Nicolas fixes the wandering marine legend upon a precise coastal topography. The trap is thus set for modern monster enthusiasts who try to establish a cryptozoological sea-horse off Brion Island.

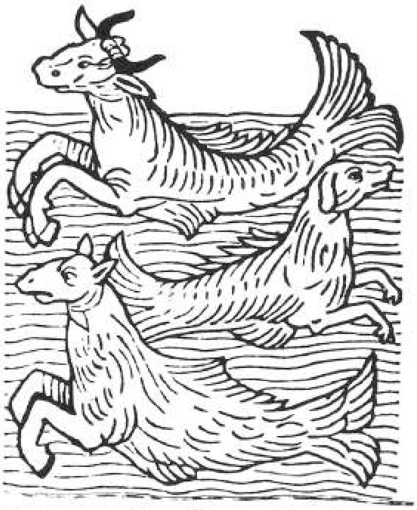
The image of the horse stayed superimposed upon the real walrus throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, even when more realistic renderings became available. We can discern in this process two evolutionary currents: in one the walrus was slowly losing its fantastic characteristics; while in the other, the purely imaginary sea-horse persisted in attracting and incorporating various pinnipedian elements. For example: the sea-horse of Father Nicolas "neighs" like the terrestrial variety. Walruses don't neigh, but under pressure of myth, this belief – already attested by Olaus Magnus – was maintained by Jakob Grimm in his prestigious German dictionary. **[13]**

Representations of the mythical sea-horse were also fed by distorted accounts of other animals, including the hippopotamus. Illustrators of medieval treatises gave to this Oliver Hardy of the animal kingdom the slender features of a stud, through a literal interpretation of its Greek name. A marvellous rendering of this "river-horse" can be found at Oxford, Here, on a corner of Magdalen College, the hippopotamus is shown in an ornamental statue from 1506 as *a long-necked horse* carrying its young on its back [see illustration opposite]. **[14]**

The accounts of scholars often reinforced the prejudice because they projected their learned preconceptions onto Nature. A Capuchin friar, Merolla, states in his *Voyage to the Congo* (1682) that the "sea-horse" dwells in the Zaire River. He saw one gambolling in the water, and heard it "neighing like a horse, to which he has a great resemblance". **[15]**

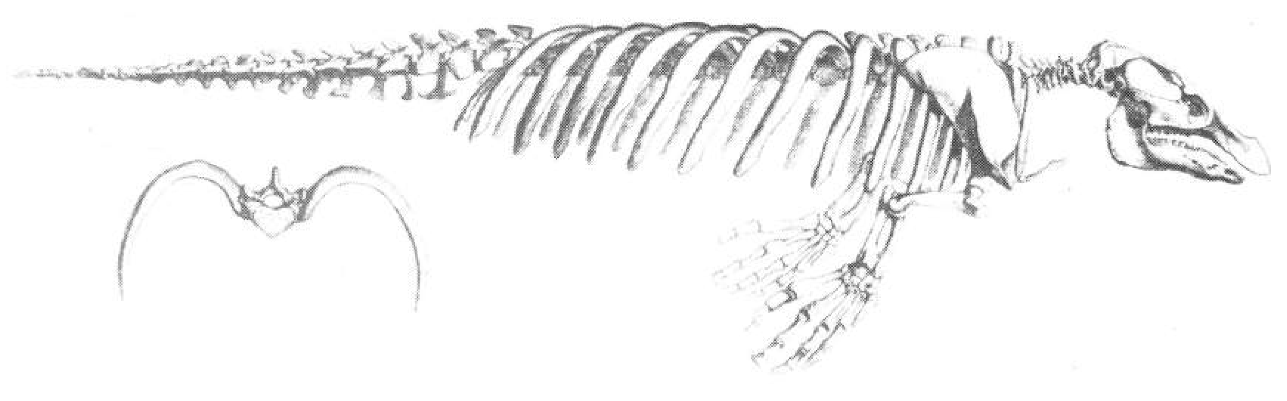
François-Marc Gagnon has shown that the habit attributed by Cartier to his "sea-horses" – of going on land by night and the sea by day – corresponds, not to the walrus, but *to the real hippopotamus*. It is not surprising, therefore, that Lescarbot's commentary on Cartier, asserts that there is a great number of "aquatic horses called *hippopotami*" in the Gulf. **[16]**

The involvement of a third real animal is masked, to some extent, by Father Nicolas' sea-horse. While travelling through the Gulf, the Recollect preist Gabriel Sagard heard sailors dis-



An engraving from the *Hortus sanitatis* **(1491), attributed to John of Cuba, depicting a sea-cow, sea-hound and sea-horse (of the** *Equus bipes* **style).** [Fortean Picture Library]

The skeleton of a manatee *(Trichetus manatus)* **showing the equine aspect of the skull; from Grassé, 1955.** [Fortean Picture Library]



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13 ■ For notes on the calls of sea-horses and sea-cows, see Note 72, p228.

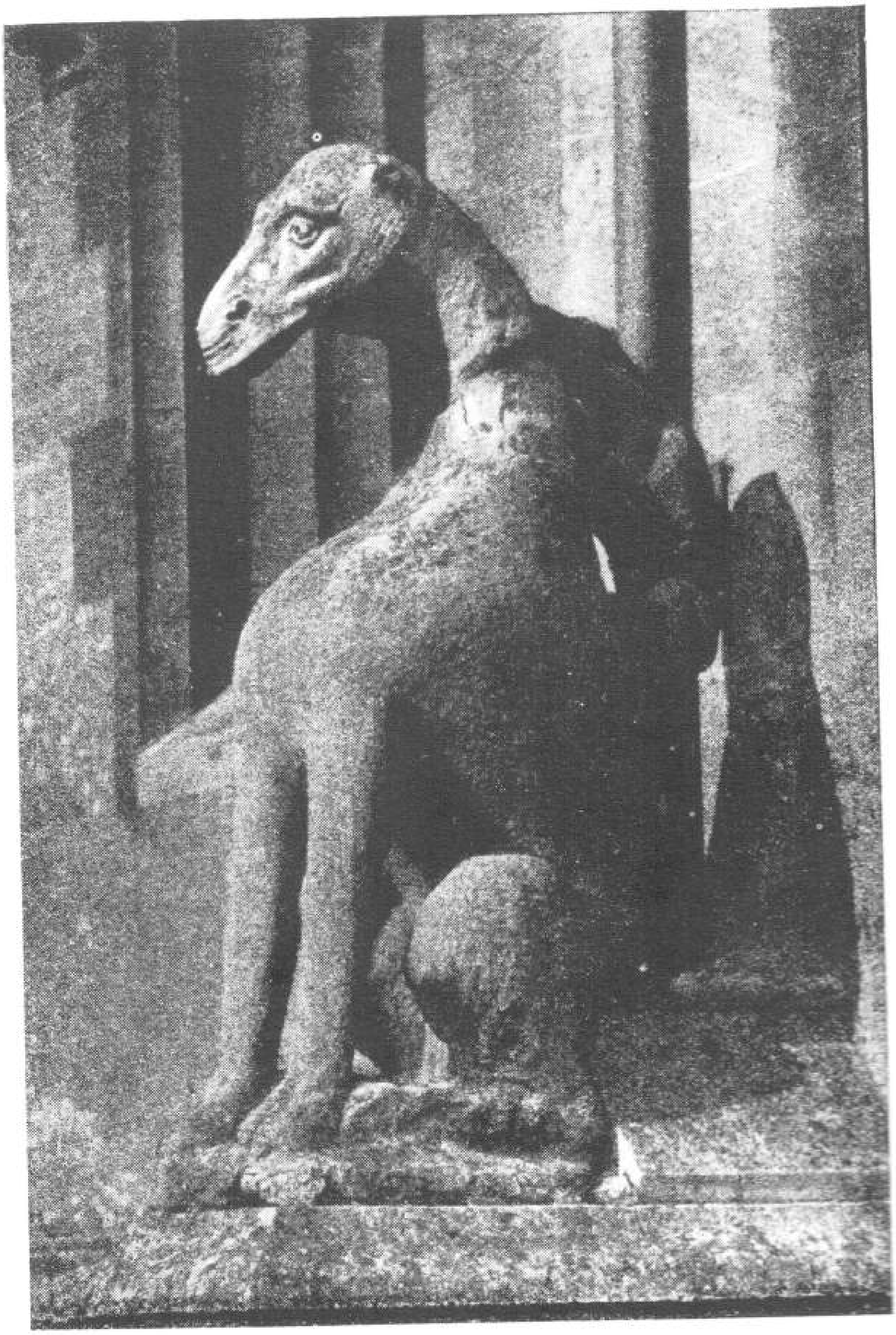
14 ■ R.T. Gunther 1925, vol 3, pp154–155.

15 ■ G. Benwell and A. Waugh 1961, p101.

16 ■ F-M Gagnon 1984, p53.

Lescarbot certainly took his equation "sea-horse = hippopotamus = walrus" from Gesner, because in the latter's *Icones animalium marinorum* we find, under the fantastic representation of a walrus, the legend "Rosmar (walrus) = hippopotamus oceani". Gesner 1560.

Gesner, in turn, is known to have owned one of the rare 1539 maps of Olaus Magnus, on which a *"Rosmarus pisces"* is placed on the northern coast of Norway (Lapland) – see our illustration on p228.



This sculpture of a 'River-horse and her young' was erected on a wall of Magdalen College, Oxford, in about 1506; from R.T. Gunther, *Early science at Oxford.* (1925). It accurately reflects the behaviour of a hippopotamus, but "how the carver-naturalist got his information" remains a mystery (p155); however the ungainly bulk of the real animal is replaced by a sleek, long-necked form with an almost earless equine head.

cussing "fishes as big as oxes" and noted that "this fish is called by the Spaniard *Maniti*, and *Hippopotamus* by others, that is to say river-horse, but I take it to be the sea-elephant. [17] The manatee was mingled with the walrus and hippopotamus to form the 'soft' concept of the sea-horse. When Father Nicolas compares the Canadian sea-horse with the one hunted in Senegal, he tells us that after investigation of the skull of the African water-steed, he concluded that they looked like the crania of horses and American mooses. He is obviously referring to the manatee in this passage, because its skull has some equine characteristics [see illustration opposite].

His own quest for exhibits had played a nasty trick on Louis Nicolas. Instead of leading him to validate the walrus, his precious tusk diverted him into admitting a theriomorphic god into the realm of zoology. Now a manatee's skull is offered as a guarantee for the marvellous sea-horse with its mane and fish-tail. Likewise, Father Vasconcelos presented a dolphin's skull

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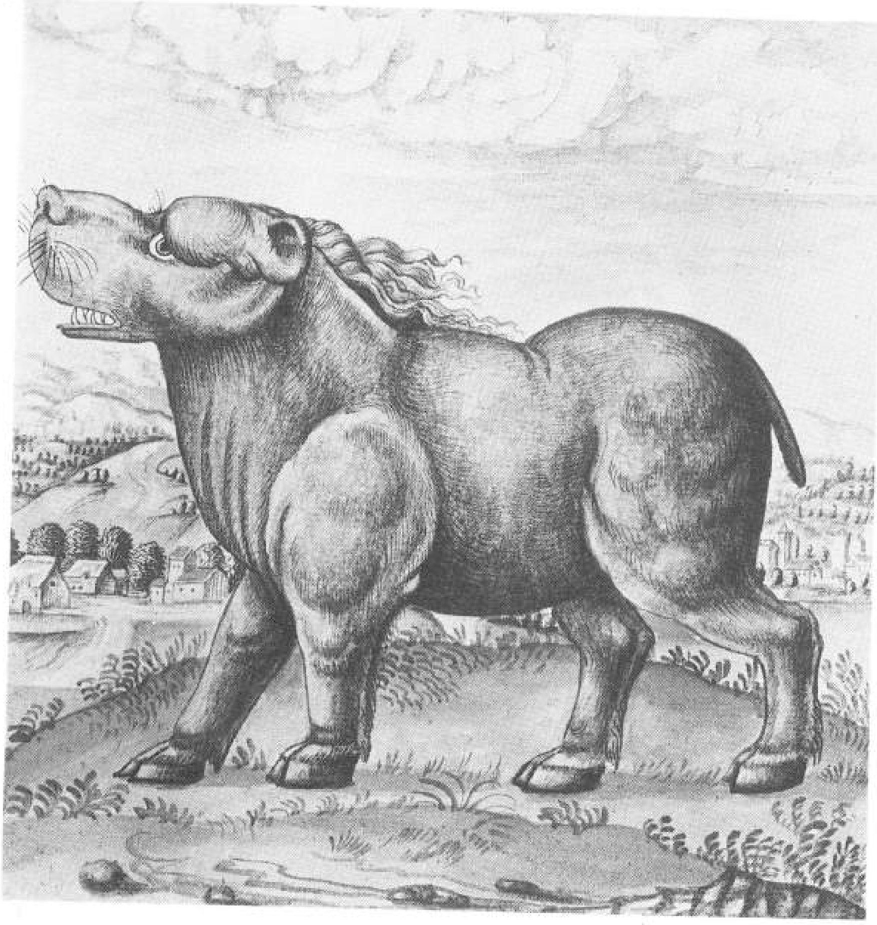
[17] ■ "It had two teeth protruding from the upper jaw, below which it is the shape of a young elephant." G. Sagard 1632.



An early representation of a hippopotamus – note the horse-like mane and hooves; from a watercolour in an Austrian codex, late 16th century. [Österreichisches Nationalbibliothek]

as proof of the *Igpupiara*, and Bartholin saw some teratological fragments as evidence for the same Brazilian merman. Scientific methods of investigation, when coupled with the promotion of faith, can give an illusory materiality to zoological myths. After all, the mermaid was asserted by the lives of some Christian saints, as well as by classical and modern authors. The two fantastic doubles of the walrus - the sea-horse and the sea-cow – were protected by the authority of Olaus Magnus and Conrad Gesner and their followers. Their independent existence was even confirmed by travellers' tales. **[18]**

Artists, especially, were prisoners of mythical stereotypes. Certain characteristic features of the horse's anatomy, like the mane, often filtered through their attempts at realistic rendering. An Austrian painter of the 16th century tried to show the bulky proportions of the hippopotamus, yet he adorned his creature with an equine mane and hooves [see illustration above].

Because of the attraction of fabulous types, the sea-cow and the sea-horse survived as admitted creatures within scholarly circles until the century of Buffon, supported by tradition and scientific fetishism. This is evidenced by the catalogues of Oxford University's earliest museum collections; in the Anatomy School's list of rarities there is mention of an "entire sea-horse's head", as well as the "hand of a supposed siren", and a "sea-cow's horn" was exhibited as late as 1749 in the collection of John Pointer. **[19]** The "sea-horse" skull was later found to be the upper jaw of a walrus; the fact that it was catalogued among the 'rarities' undoubtedly delayed its identification. **[20]**

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[18] ■ Father Kircher tells us of the "swimming cow" of the Chinese province of Kwangtung (Guangdong). It has horns and "sometimes emerges from its element, and herds with the other cattle in order to fight them." A. Kircher (1661), cited in Bassett 1885.

[19] ■ R.T. Gunther 1925, vol 3, pp267, 277, & 339.

[20] ■ *ibidem*, p346.

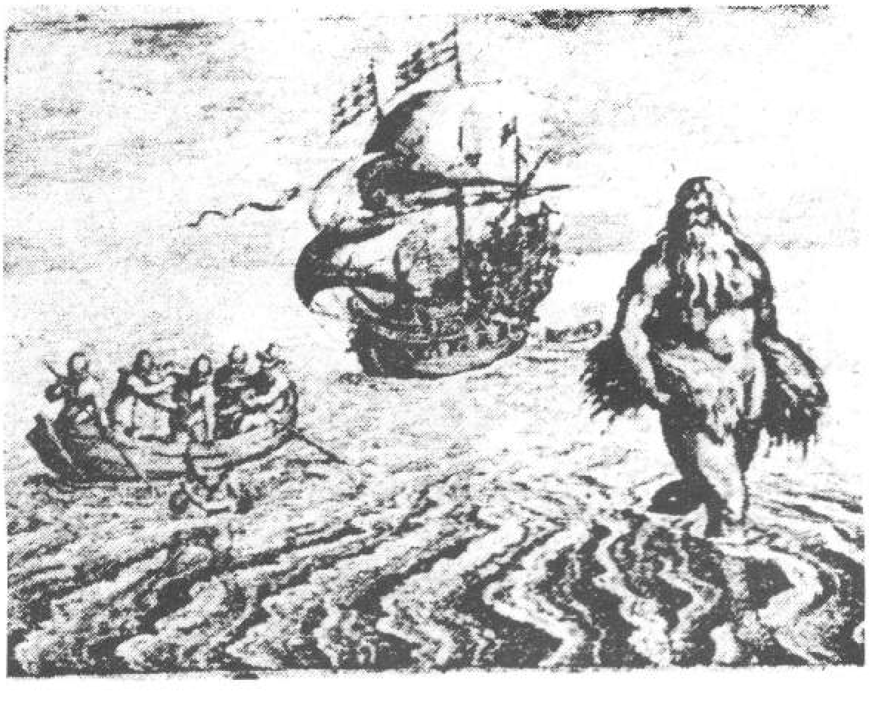
WHALERS' TALES AND MONSTROUS HYBRIDS

Sea-horses and sea-cows have survived longer in popular culture. Various pinnipeds were presented at the end of the 18th century under the legendary name of *"chevaux marins"* (sea-horses); for example, a sideshow exhibit in the fair at Reims in 1772. **[21]** A whole cycle of legends had developed, presenting sea-cows as the "herds" of the undersea folk. Proof of this is their inclusion among the yarns of Scandinavian sailors. A German broadsheet of 1620 tells how the crew of a Danish ship captured a merman as he walked on the sea-floor carrying a bundle of straw under each arm [see illustration below]. The sea-man conversed with them in Danish and praised God. **[22]** Modern Norwegian versions of this story explain that this sea-herdsman was on his way to tend his livestock. **[23]**

Learned men, in the 18th century, were still trying to classify the "sea-cow" as a real animal. In 1747, Johann Anderson reported that Icelanders had heard the lowing of a sea-cow. Its call drives their pasturing cows mad and they rush into the sea. According to him the sea-cow was a beast with seal-like appendages and the head of an ox. **[24]** This is doubtless the Scandinavian version of the Irish and Scottish legend of water-cattle, which emerge from the sea and lakes to mingle with terrestrial herds. **[25]**

At the end of the century, during a study of the fauna of Greenland, the clergyman Otto Fabricius suggested that the merman (*"Havstrambe"*) and the sea-cow were in fact the *same creature*, which he identified as a real but rare denizen of Greenland's coast: Buffon's manatee, or Steller's sea-cow (*Rhytina stelleri*). But he also mentions that the name given to this strange creature by the Eskimos – *"Auvekoejak"* – was also given by them to the *fur seal.* **[26]**

Fabricius seems to have fallen into the same misunderstanding as Father Nicolas did over the *Mishipizhiw.*



This merman, striding through the ocean with bundles of straw, told his Danish captors that he was on his way to feed his underwater livestock. From *'Description of an unheard of sea-wonder'*, a German broadsheet dated 1620. [Fortean Picture Library]

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21 ■ René Gandillon, 'Saltimbanques et comédiens aux foires de Reims', in *Mémoires de la Société d'Agriculture de la Marne*, 1980, p129.

22 ■ See R.W. Brednich, 'Historische Bezeugung dämonologischer Sagen', in L. Röhrich 1973, pp59-61.

23 ■ J. Lindow 1978.

24 ■ J. Anderson 1747, p115.

Folklorist Jacqueline Simpson notes: "In winter, when cracks appear in the ice and cause loud booming noises, men say that the *Nykur* is neighning." She also says that cattle were not introduced to the island of Grimsey, off the northern coast of Iceland, until the 1850s, because of the residents fears that the calls of the *Nykur* would lure their precious livestock into the sea. (Simpson 1972, p96f.)

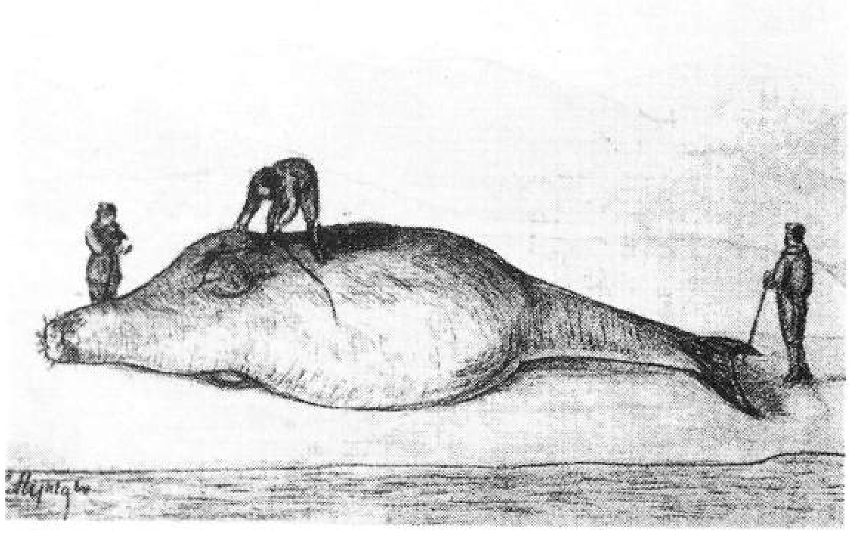
A.A. MacGregor notes that the monster of Loch Awe, in the Scottish Highlands "was noisiest in time of hard frost." When the loch was frozen over, the monster "could be heard in the act of breaking up the ice by its powerful and irresistible movements." (MacGregor 1937, p81f.)

The Amerindians also associated the bellowing of a water-monster with cracking ice (see Note 17, p235), and the Spring thaw (see Chapter 2, p172).

On "lowing" of sea-cows, see also Note 72, p230f.

25 ■ See Chapter 2, p122.

26 ■ O. Fabricius 1780, p6.



A drawing of G.W. Steller taking measurements of a specimen of the giant sea-cow (named after him *Rhytina stelleri*). A colony of these gentle vegetarian giants was discovered in 1741, when Vitus Bering's ill-fated expedition to Alaska was stranded on an island off the Siberian coast. Within 30 years they were hunted to virtual extinction, although rumours of sightings continue to this day. From F. Golder, *Bering's voyages* (1925). [Fortean Picture Library]

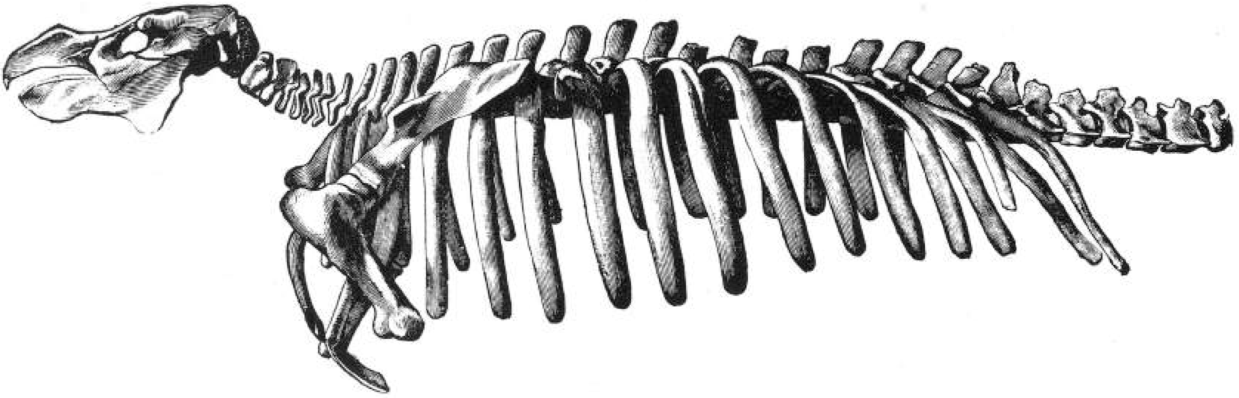
The walrus was one of the perceived forms of the Great Lynx; and, comparatively, the fur seal may have sometimes embodied the mysterious animal of the Eskimos. Fabricius translated cultural information into cryptozoological data, uniting *three* distinct mythical features: the merman and sea-cow of Scandinavia and the anomalic definition of the Eskimos' *Auvekoejak*. He obtained this fusion by transforming mythical elusiveness into a natural scarcity. Steller's sea-cow, as a rare and recently discovered inhabitant of a distant sea, was a good candidate for rationalizing the identity of a misty sea-monster.

Peter Burke has shown that the Church had tried to penetrate the closed culture of fishermen and sailors [27]; and Paul Lester has extended his analysis to encompass Bishop Pontoppidan's reportage of sea-monster sightings claimed by his own Norwegian fishermen. [28} Yet it would be an error to interpret the Bishop of Bergen as on a par with a modern zoologist, giving a scientific explanation to pragmatic observations. His approach was polemical; Pontoppidan wished to replace the *magical* world-view of the fishermen by a religio-naturalistic one. Asserting the local popular belief in the sea-serpent gave him the opportunity to present to the European intelligentsia the living Leviathan. The chapter on sea-monsters in his *Natural history of Norway* – especially the part dealing with the Great Sea-Serpent – was related to *sacred* natural history. His Leviathan, incarnated as the Norwegian *Sjøorm*, was his patriotic response to other pious naturalists who saw in the biblical beast some giant *shark*. [29]

27 ■ P. Burke 1978, pp43–46.

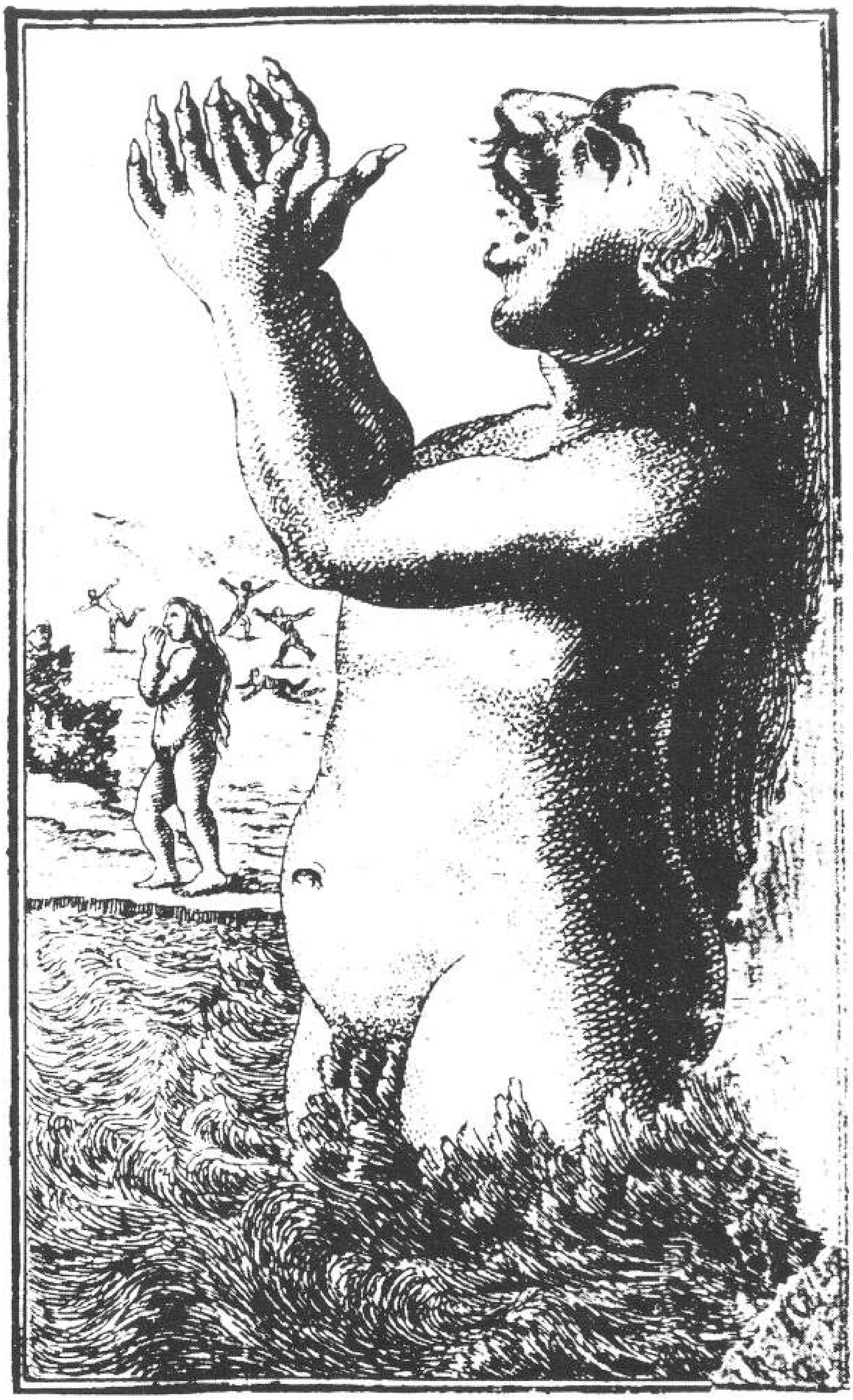
28 ■ P. Lester 1984, p4.

29 ■ Johann-Jakob Scheuchzer interpreted it as a hammer-head shark. (Scheuchzer 1735, vol7, p238.)



A skeleton of Steller's sea-cow, *Rhytina stelleri*, after Nordenskjöld (1886). [Fortean Picture Library]

In the first sighting of these giant sea-cows, which could reach 35 feet in length, Steller described them as drifting like *overturned boats*.



According to an anonymous history of Dalmatia – *Alter und never Staat des Königreichs Dalmatien* **(1718) – a great merman** *('Meerman'),* **15-feet-long, emerged from the sea near Dubrovnik, in 1716. It was observed for some time through a field-glass, and on reaching the shore, it gave a "great shout". Its long flowing mane compares with the** *mane* **typical of water-spirits in humanoid form.** [Fortean Picture Library]

Pontoppidan's zoological knowledge was instrumental to the demonstration of his faith. Since he couldn't renounce the Leviathan, whose existence was endorsed by the Bible, and the mermaid, vouched for by the Church Fathers, he needed the *Sjøorm* and the *Havstrambe*. Poor fishermen on a windy coast were thus helping a prince of the Church to sustain the truth of Holy Writ; and their reports came to him filtered through the interpretations of his local clergy, scrutinized and ready for zoological conjecture. When such low clerics happened, themselves, to see a sea-monster, such as a merman, the creature reflected nothing of the magical world. For example: a minister, Peter Angel, told Pontoppidan that, as a young man in 1719, he examined a stranded merman in Nordland. It was a colossus, six metres long, with a roughly human face, a porpoise-like tail, and "hands" like "the paws of a sea-calf" (seal). [30] The Bishop classified it as a type of "whale". [31] Like the *Igpupiara* killed by the colonial knight, this unidentified sea-mammal has fixed the Nordic merman as a seal-like creature. No more a polyglot long-bearded "sea-wonder", the Nordland merman had been transformed into an unknown animal ready for the dissection table.

Pontoppidan also makes us think about elements of the original beliefs of the Norwegian fishermen when he writes that they call sea-monsters generally *"troll fisk"* ("enchanted fishes"). He describes some of them, and in doing so changes supernature into nature, evil hybrids into plausible animals. For example: a bizarre cat encased in a lobster shell becomes a "sea-armadillo"; a snake with feet, a "sea-crocodile"; and the legendary merman, a "sea-ape". [32]

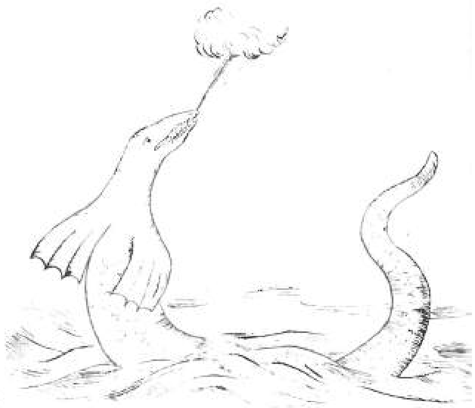
The learned bishop had translated diabolism into exoticism. At the level of the specific representations of sea-monsters, made by the fishermen to Pontoppidan, the importance of mammalian forms is underlined. [33] This is symbolized by Pontoppidan's "classic" description of the Great Sea-Serpent as having a snout "like a *cow* or a *horse*, with large nostrils and several stiff hairs standing out on each side like whiskers." [34]

Then, the majority of the Bishop's informants belonged to the parish of Bergen and Norway's west coast, from whence the whale-boats travelled regularly to Greenland, where seals were hunted on a large scale. The colonization of Greenland after 1721 – under the direction of the missionary Hans Egede – was largely a consequence of the Bergen interest in its whale and seal hunting grounds. [35] Pontoppidan himself recorded this annual migration: "Our Bergen seamen, who every year in the month of March, sail from hence to Jan Mayan Island, or to the eastern side of Greenland, in large ships." Then he describes how the hunters, armed with the *"dollstock"* (club-hook), fell seals by the dozen. [36] This interest in cetaceans and pinnipeds dominated the folklore of seamen from the west coast of Norway; their imaginary beings borrowed the characteristics of whales, seals and walrus. This is a common feature in cultures based upon whaling and seal-hunting, and the Eskimos of the Bering Strait give us a creative example. [37]

In his great saga of whale-hunting, *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville said that, as the sea surpassed the land in wild rumours, "so the whale fishery surpasses every other sort of maritime life in the wonderfulness and fearfulness of the rumours which sometimes circulate there." [38] One important aspect for the enhancement of this imaginary world was the contact between European and North American whalers with the culture of non-European fishermen, such as those of the Eskimos and the natives of the Siberian coast. Because they had their own sea-monsters some intellectual exchange was possible.

MATERIAL HISTORY OF EXCHANGE
OF IDEAS VIA WHALE FISHERIES

This is precisely the subject of a relatively unknown novel by Jules Verne: *The stories of Jean-Marie Cabidoulin* (1902) [see illustration opposite]. Having witnessed a panic at Petropavlovsk, the capital of Kamchatka, where native fisher-



The towering monster, "as high as the masthead", was observed by Hans Egede and other missionaries sailing to Greenland, on 6 July 1734. One of their company, Pastor Bing drew this impression on a later map . Later copies of the drawing turn the blast of spray from the creature's mouth into a whale-like spout. See also Note 35 (above). [Fortean Picture Library]

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30 ■ E. Pontoppidan 1755, p190.

31 ■ *ibidem.*

32 ■ *ibidem*, p184.

33 ■ According to Pontoppidan, a fisherman saw a giant sea-monster with a seal's head, two miles from Bergen. (E. Pontoppidan 1755, p184.)

34 ■ E. Pontoppidan 1755, p200.

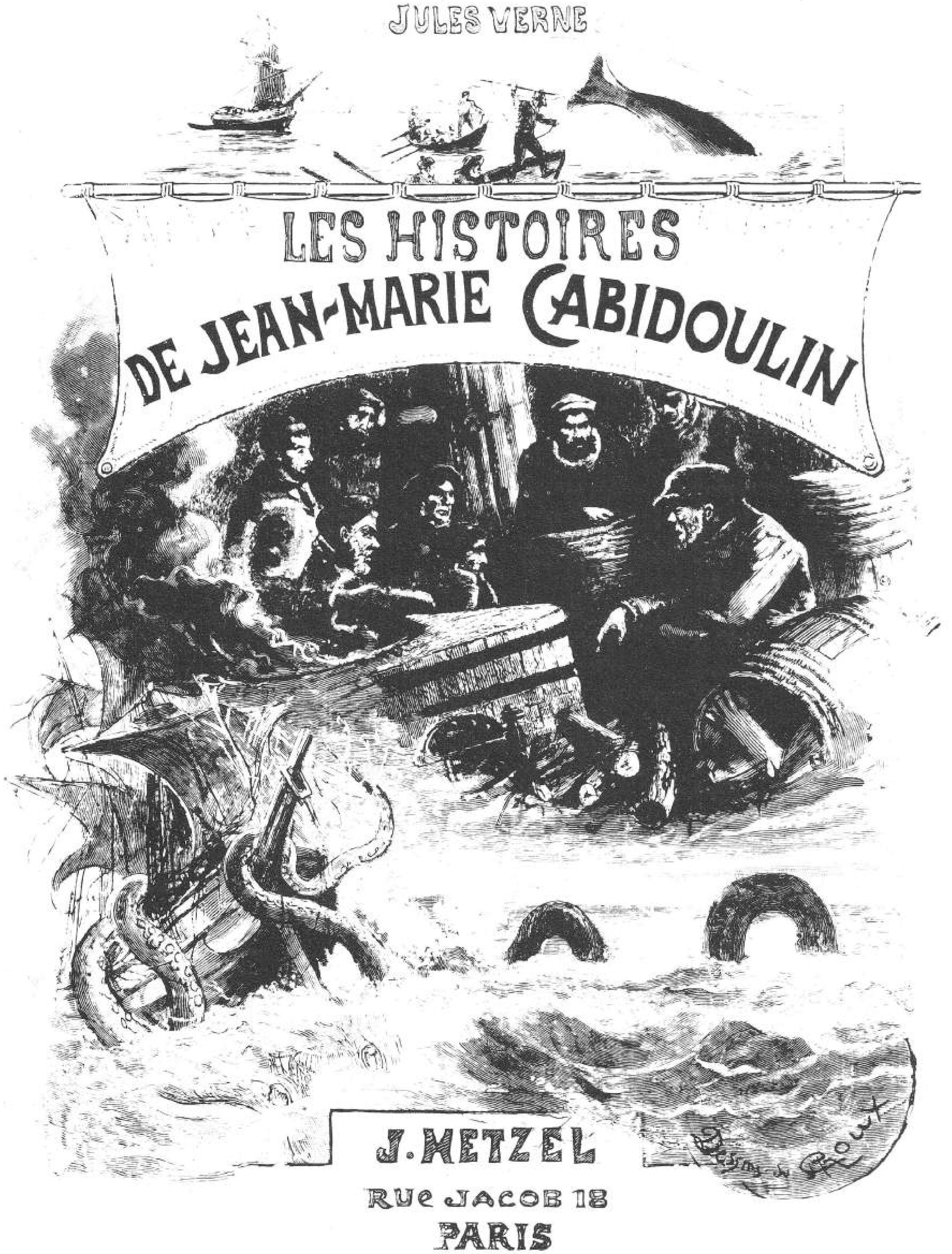
35 ■ See H.C. Gulløv and H. Kapel 1979, p18.

Hans Egede, himself, had a famous sighting, in the company of others, in 1734, of a huge monster with serpentine, cetacean and pinnipedian characteristics and fiery red eyes, near Greenland – see illustration. (See Heuvelmans 1968, p100ff.)

36 ■ E. Pontoppidan 1755, p200.

37 ■ According to Edward William Nelson, the "walrus-dog" – *"Az-i-wû-gûm-kĭ-mukh-'tĭ"* – is to be "found in company with large herds of walrus... It is a long, slender animal, covered with black scales, which are tough but which may be pierced by a good spear. It has a head and teeth somewhat like those of a dog, and four legs; its tail is long, rounded and scaly, and a stroke from it will kill a man." Eskimos told Nelson that "their *walrus-hunters* are very much afraid of them." (Nelson 1899, part 1, pp442–443.)

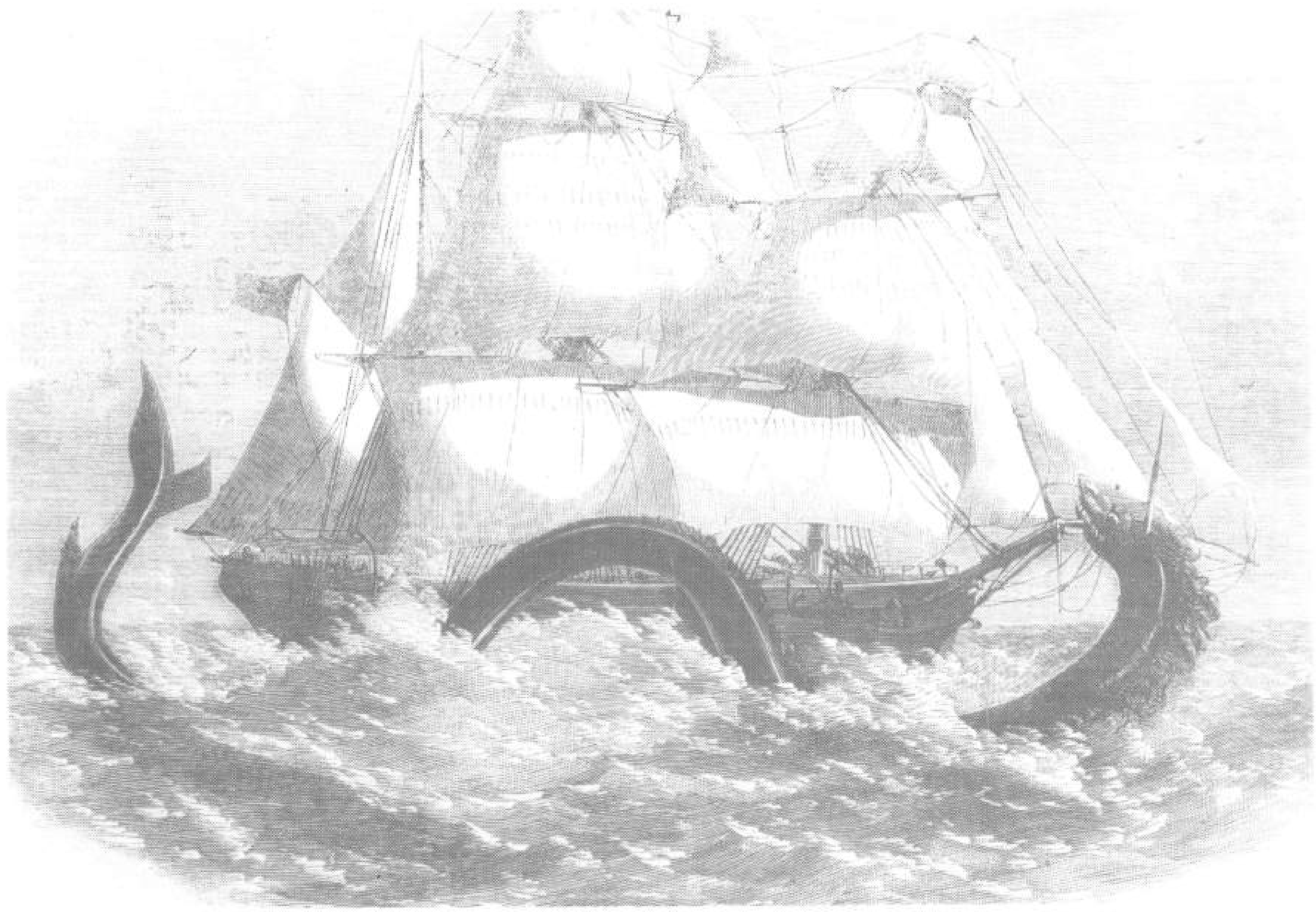
38 ■ H. Melville 1987 [1851], Chapter 41, p278.


JULES VERNE
LES HISTOIRES DE JEAN-MARIE CABIDOULIN
J. HETZEL
RUE JACOB 18
PARIS
Dessins de Roux

The half-title illustration by George Roux for *Les histoires de Jean-Marie Cabidoulin* by Jules Verne (1902).

The story, which has never been translated into English, describes the effects of the whalers' folklore about sea-monsters on their imaginations and experiences, especially after the hero and his company come into contact with native fishermen of Kamchatka whose belief in such a monster intensifies their own.

[Fortean Picture Library]



men claimed to have been chased by a giant sea-monster with a mane and crab-like pincers, the crew of a French whale-boat is terrified by the eruption of an undersea volcano. Their ship runs aground on a newly formed island, a "moving reef", which they interpret as the back of the giant monster. The French whalers had been made receptive to the native beliefs by their own sea-serpent legends, and they too suffer a panic as they imagine the ship held fast by the sea-giant's claws. [**39**]

Paul Lester has remarked that "in the early 19th century most of the growing body of sea-serpent reports seemed to have emanated from New England in particular, then the centre of the thriving whaling industry." [**40**] Then Melville reminds us that among the crew of such American whale-boats were non-Europeans, noting that "many of [the] most daring harpooners" from Nantucket came from an Amerindian village at Gay Head. [**41**] Such mixed crews may have produced a composite folklore in which traditional European sea-monsters met their exotic counterparts. A brief analysis of the sea-serpent stories of whalers shows, indeed, not only the familiar sea-horse and sea-unicorns [**42**], but also possible externally influenced forms such as the "sea-alligator". [**43**]

Sometimes influences between two fishermen's tales are identifiable, as in the case of a sea-monster from Greenland, the *Imap Umassoursua*, described as a "flattish creature, the size of an island. Sailors live in terror of taking soundings which indicate that the water is rapidly becoming shallow, for it might mean that the *Imap Umassoursua* is rising off the ocean floor directly under the boat." [**44**] This creature of modern belief corresponds exactly to the island-like giant *Kraken* of the

Illustration of the alleged incident in which the *British Banner* was attacked by a unicorned sea-serpent, on 25 April 1859; Heuvelmans is almost certainly correct in classing as a hoax (*In the wake of the sea-serpents*, 1968, p224). [Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library]

Although Heuvelmans makes no comment about the horn of the alleged monster, it seems to be based upon the sightings of a unicorn-serpent in Gloucester Bay, Massachusetts, in 1817. The main witness, Colonel T.H. Perkins, observed, through "a fine glass", from a clifftop vantage, "an appearance in the front of the head like a single horn, about nine inches to a foot in length, and of the form of a marlinspike." (Cited in P.H. Gosse, *Romance of natural history*, 1860, p308).

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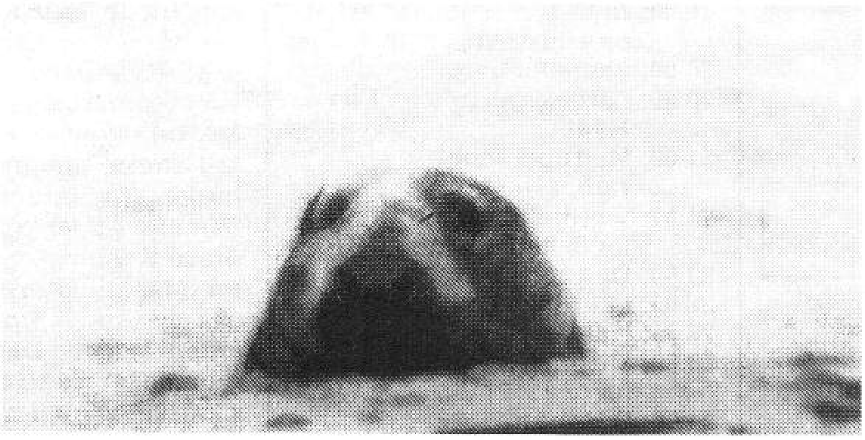
39 ■ J. Verne 1902.

40 ■ P. Lester 1984, p5.
The whaling boom of 1846–1847 coincided with the opening of the hunting-ground for the Bowhead whale in the Kamchatka Sea, where Jules Verne located Cabidoulin's sea-serpent adventure. See J.T.Jenkins 1921, p236.



The *"Sjœku"* or "sea-cow" seen, in 1987, off the western coast of Norway, where the belief in the legendary sea-cow survives. The unidentified pinniped was photographed by Roger Engvik; from *Sunmœrposten* (14 Aug 1987).
[© Roger Engvik]

Norwegian west coast, described by Pontoppidan as producing sudden shallows under fishing boats. [45] This development is understandable, given the old contacts between the seal-hunters of Bergen and Greenland.

But mythical monsters using the seal or walrus as embodiment are more numerous and have persisted for a long time. In August 1987, I visited Hareidland, an island on the west coast of Norway, in the Sunmøre province, where Pontoppidan heard his stories of the *Kraken* and the sea-serpent. Before the Greenpeace campaign, in the 1960s, groups of local fishermen still sailed regularly to Greenland for the seal hunting. They would stay the whole winter, occupying their leisure time by carving seal bones. I have seen such sculptures in the glacial sea museum at Brandal. Given this strong interest and commitment, it is no wonder that the merfolk and sea-cow persisted in local legend. My host's wife's grandfather confided to her that he had seen the head of the *Havman* (merman) one day, protruding from the sea off the island of Bremangerland.

More recently, in July 1987, there was wide coverage in the Norwegian media of the alleged capture of a beautiful mermaid, with long flowing hair, by sailors of the ship *Asbjøm Selsbane* off the Lofoten coast. This was evidently a summer hoax, a *"sommerspøk"*, but a tiny rivulet of quasi-belief may linger on here helping such jokes to take root, even for a short time. Also in the 1960s, an unidentified species of sea-mammal was seen around Vigra, close to Hareidland. Its head was photographed by Roger Enguik [see illustration above], who told me that residents called the beast *"sjøku"*, the sea-cow. Seen from a distance this head could be taken for that of a merman.

To find a description of the regional sea-horse we have to open the book of Sunmøre folktales collected by local teacher Kristian Bugge, published in 1934. A fisherman told him how, "during an uncommonly hot summer", he saw the dreadful *Havhest.* It looked like a "huge horse, kneeling". When the creature raised its head, the fisherman saw a "gaping mouth" in which shone a "double row of teeth, both up and down. The teeth were about two metres long, *especially the canines*; its eyes were small, yellow, glittering and spitting fire. It puffed out steam as from a steamer, from its nose and throat; and its breath smelled so bad that we felt almost nauseous." Down its neck and back "flowed a long waving mane." "Its thick forefeet were like the limbs of a *seal*, and it swam with them. Its hind quarters

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41 ■ H. Melville 1987 [1851], Chapter 26, p215.

42 ■ According to one newspaper report (no data given), the crew of the whaler *Hope On*, while waiting in their boats, off Panama, for a whale, saw a "horned head" emerge from the sea "with two unicorn-like horns protruding from it". The creature also had "four legs" and "a tail which appeared to be divided into two parts". (Bassett 1885, p227.)

The Nordic sea-unicorn – see also our Chapter 5, p255 – has been materialized here by an erroneous description in which the Narwhal was confused with the walrus. De la Martiniére calls this latter animal a "sea-horse" (*"cheval marin"*), but confers upon it the ivory tooth of the male Narwhal. (De la Martiniére 1671, pp139–141.)

43 ■ In 1884, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reproduced the alleged report of one "Johnson, mate of the whaler *Alaska*". While in waters "forty-six miles south of Alaska", the boat was attacked by a 30-foot-long "lizard" with an "alligator's head". The monster struck its "immense tail against the craft". After a long battle, it was finally harpooned; "the tail was cut off and stuffed and brought to this city, and is now on exhibition." (Bassett 1885, p216.)

This obvious humbug is perhaps partly inspired by other stories of "sea-alligator" attacks, such as that upon the schooner *Eagle* on 23 March 1830 (see Heuvelmans 1968, p173f), and partly by Eskimo stories about the *Păl-rai-yûk* with its elongated head (see E.W.Nelson 1899, p444; and Chapter 3, p168).

Nelson's informants considered the *Păl-rai-yûk* to be an extinct *fresh water animal*, but more recent stories describe it as a *sea-creature* with a snake-like head, dwelling off Nunivak Island. (R. Mackal 1980, p30f.) The *San Francisco Chronicle* report might have been a whaler's yarn based upon descriptions of the *Păl-rai-yûk*.

44 ■ Finnish newspaper *Ilta Sanomat* July 1954, reported in *Fortean Times* N° 46 (1986), p29.

See also Appendix 6, for discussion of the Chilean "Hide".

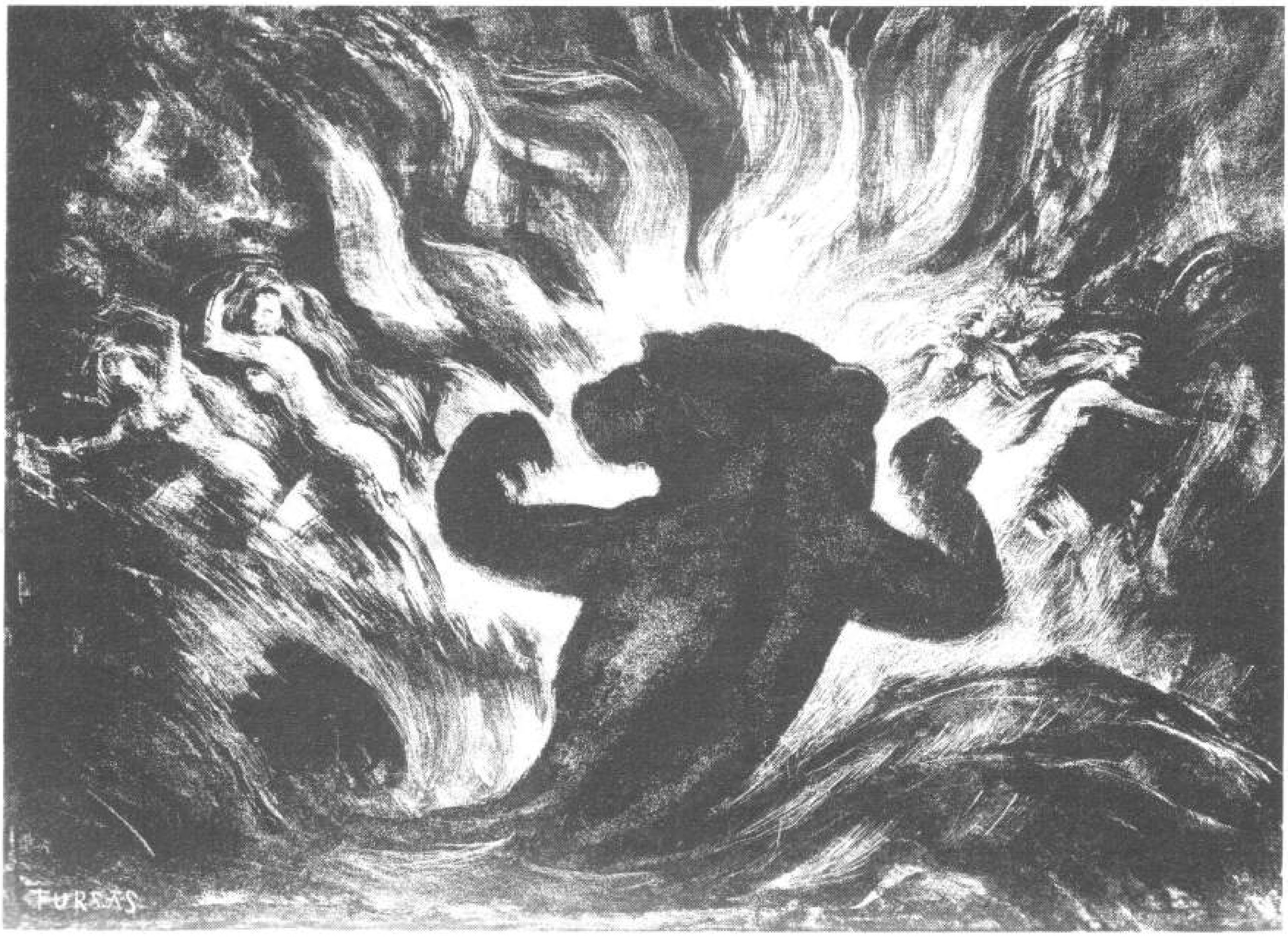
45 ■ E. Pontoppidan 1755, p210.

were under water and could not be seen clearly, but it had a *long slippery tail* with which it whipped the sea to foam." The sea-horse came straight towards the boat; so close that "we could easily have touched it with our oars," testified the sailor. It narrowly missed the boat. [46]

This description of the *Havhest* is a transformation of the *Equus bipes* of antiquarian Scandinavian folklore into a creature influenced by the local seal-hunting culture. It also integrates pinnipedian elements: eg. the seal-like forefeet replace the "horse's" hooves of the popular image. Other details belong to the walrus: the extraordinary long teeth with emphasis on the canines, and also the eyes "spitting fire". One writer has compared walrus's eyes to "glowing coals". [47]

But what can we do about the "long slippery tail"? We must remember that the walrus was called *"Roshwalr"* or horse-whale in Norwegian, a vernacular name which expresses the medieval European belief that the walrus was the *mate of the whale*. The first representation of a walrus was made as an interpretation of a head sent, in 1520, to Pope Leo X by the Norwegian bishop Erik Walkendorf. This image was transmitted to Father Louis Nicolas through the works of Gesner and Paré. The caption to this first image read: *"In Norway my name is Ruszor, but I am called the Cetus dentatus; the name of my wife is Balena."* [48]

The *Havhest* described above seems to be an illustration of this interpretation of the word *"Roshwalr"*; it unites pinnipedian and cetacean elements. The "steam" surrounding the sea-horse's nostrils seems to be inspired by a whale's spout.



The Finnish sea-giant *Tursas* emerging from the waves. A lithograph by Matti Bjorklund.
[© Larousse, Paris]

According to Kiparsky and Kiparsky (1952) Tursas is similar to the mythical double of the walrus ("Rosmarus"), the giant *Rosmer*, mentioned in the popular 18th century Norwegian ballad called 'Rosmer'. This sea-giant, covered with seal-skins, is the "Rosmarine" of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen* (1590): "The horrible sea-satyre... and greedy Rosmarines... "

The name 'Tursas' is derived from the name of an old Norse giant (Kiparsky & Kiparsky).

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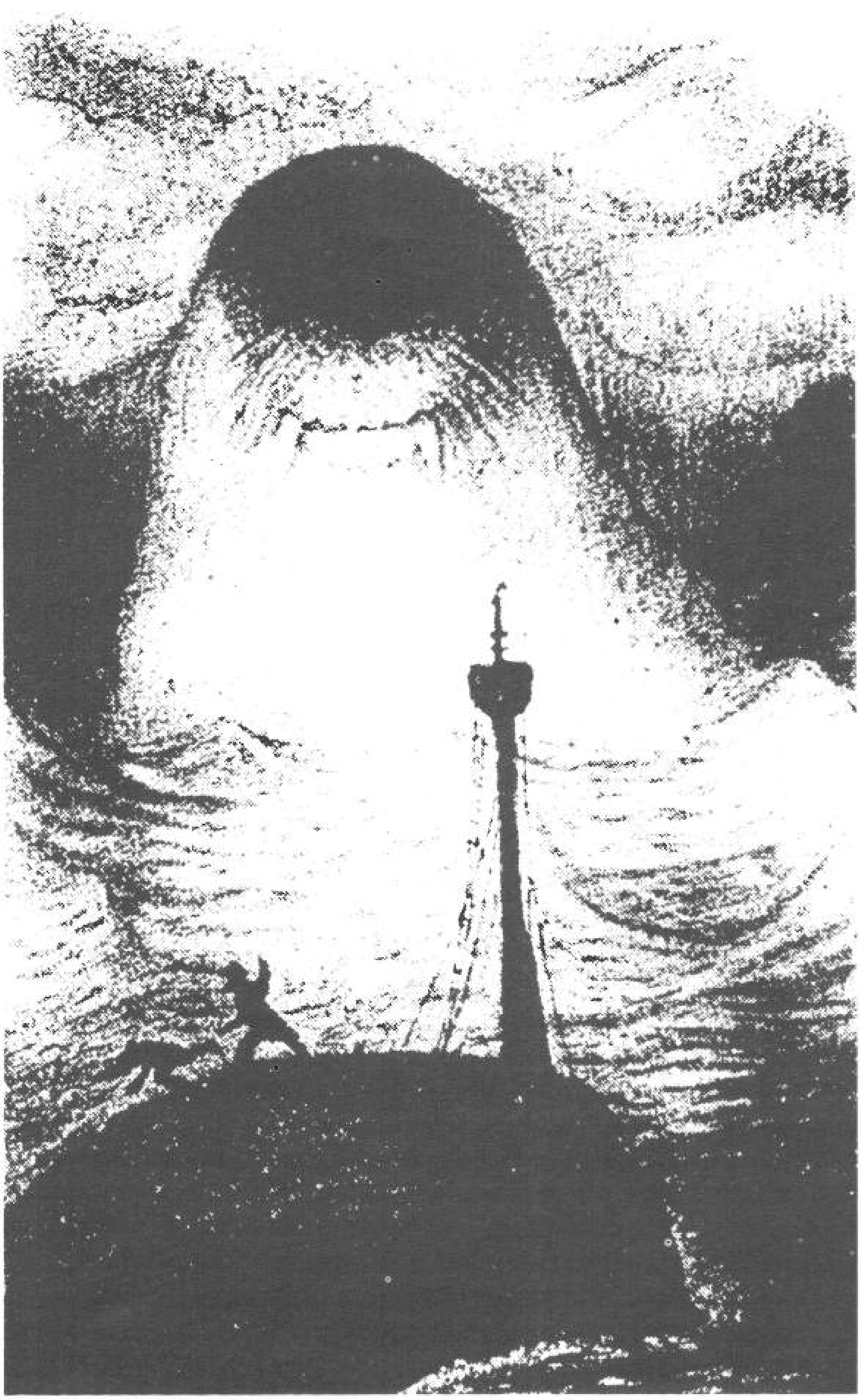
[46] ■ K. Bugge 1934, pp103–105.
This behaviour is comparable with the monster that charged Mrs Hicks' boat; see Appendix 4.

[47] ■ Cited in J.A. Allen 1880.

[48] ■ V. Kiparsky, 'l'Histoire du morse', in *Annales Academiae Scientarum Fennicae* (Helsinki), vol 73, 1952.



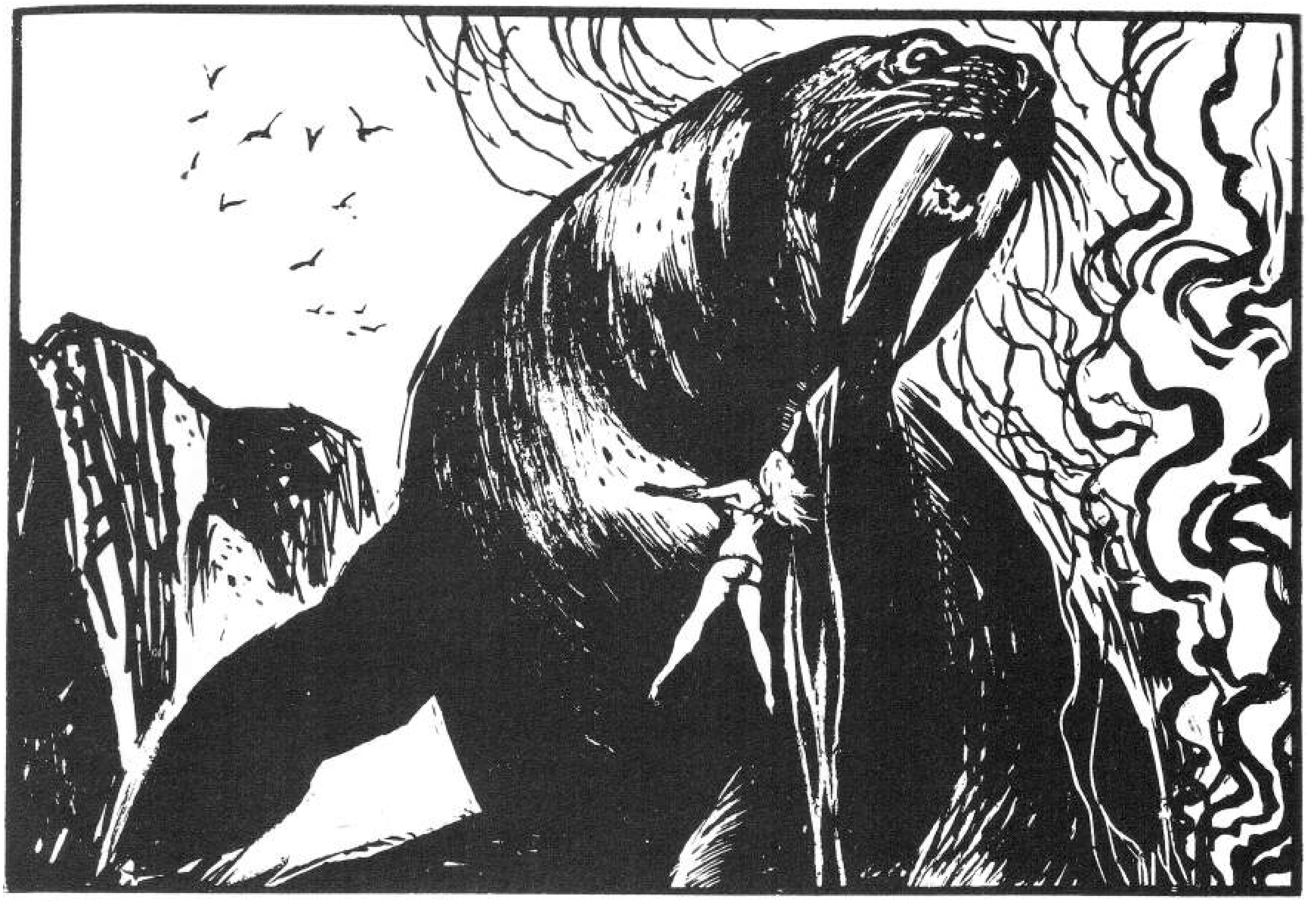
'Das Seegespenst' **by Alfred Kubin (c1902)** [Private collection, Stuttgart]

Kubin (1877–1959) has illustrated Poe's 'Descent into the Maelstöm', transforming the giant whirlpool into a sea-monster, a gigantic *walrus*, **whose towering mass looms like a dark breaker about to overwhelm the wrecked ship.**

This impressive work also reminds us of the suggestive but false translation of the Finnish *"morss"* **(walrus) as the Latin** *"mors"* **(death) (Kiparsky & Kiparsky, 1952).**

The "long slippery tail" is also clearly cetacean, carrying an image of the porpoise's wet glistening tail. Bugge's informant was well acquainted with walrus and whales, and the morphology of his *Havhest* includes bits and pieces of the body and habits of these animals. Such first-hand descriptions are particularly deceptive for cryptozoologists and others who seek to interpret sea-monsters as unknown animals. The coherency of Bugge's *Havhest* is given by an accumulation of realistic details building up an idealistic creature. Realism should not be mistaken for reality. This *Havhest* is a horse–walrus–whale corresponding to a local definition, by a society of whalers and seal-hunters, of the more general concept of the imaginary sea-horse.

SIMILAR TO THE
"CUMULATIVE" MODE OF
EVIDENCE PRACTISED BY
SPR
— 'SPECTRES OF THE SELF'
- SHANE McCORRISTONE



Octobriana, the Russian Barbarella, fights a giant walrus hidden in the Kamoogi, or "death-volcano", on the coast of Kamchatka, in 1934; from *Octobriana and the Russian Underground*, edited by Peter Sadecky (1971). [© Tom Stacey]

Jules Verne's *Les histoires de Jean-Marie Cabidoulin* **(1902), features "rumours" among the fishermen of the Koryak tribe, also of Kamchatka, about the "bloody remains of a giant". In the story presented by Sadecky, the Kamchatkan natives complain of having to make sacrifices to the monstrous walrus for "fifty years".**

MONSTERS IN THE LAKES OF QUEBEC

Now, if we return to the Gulf of Saint-Lawrence, we find another community of whalers at work. Basque whaleboats came to the Gulf regularly, following in the wake of Jacques Cartier. In 1609, an old Basque whaler named Savalee told Lescarbot that he had made 42 trips to New France. [**49**] Besides the cetaceans, the whalers also pursued the walrus for its ivory. The great slaughter of the walrus had begun, as testified by Richard Fisher: "They have been fifteen hundredth [sic] killed by one small barke in the year 1591." [**50**]

Two years later, harpooners from Saint-Malo – Cartier's hometown – rushed across the Atlantic for their share of the spoils. This frenetic hunt progressively reduced the great herds to the point of extinction. Dr Bernard Gilpin wrote, in 1869, that in a search for the Saint-Lawrence walrus he could find no living specimen; only whitened skeletons piled up in gloomy heaps on the shores of Miscou Bay, "in such numbers that they created artificial beaches". [**51**]

The walrus had left the Gulf, but one can argue that its doubles, the sea-horse and the sea-cow, survived longer by evolving into a fresh-water monster. At Lake Pohénégamook, the first settlers and loggers – like Louis Bérubé – told of the sea-cows (*"vaches marine"*) sometimes glimpsed in the lake. This was the first layer of the saga of the lake beast. Elzéar Sirois told me that, around 1918, when he was a young man, he enjoyed swimming with his friends in Lake Pohénégamook: "We liked to swim across the lake. One day an old resident, Georges

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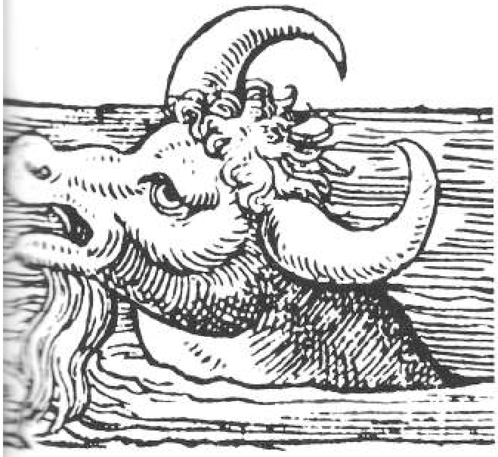
49 ■ M. Vaucaire 1941, p68f.

50 ■ Cited in J.A. Allen 1880.

51 ■ *ibidem*, p67.



Gesner's (1560) version of the 'sea-cow' (*"vacca marina"*) on the *Carta marina* **(1539) of Olaus Magnus.** [Fortean Picture Library]

Gérard, then 85 years old, asked me: 'Are you playing with the *sea-cows*?'" **[52]**

The phrase "vache-marine" was also a vernacular term for the *walrus* in Canadian French. It appears with this sense in Nicolas Denys' *Description of Acadia* (1672). In depicting various sea "fishes", Denys writes of the "sea-cow" (*"les Vaches Marines"*), "otherwise called beasts of the big tooth" (*"Bêtes-á-la-Grande Dent"*). **[53]**

After the publication of the original edition of this present book, *Monstres des lacs du Québec*, in Montréal, in 1982, I returned to Lake Pohénégamook. Fresh interviews revealed that *six* of the alleged *marine* types of monster in Heuvelmans' classification **[54]** were reported in this fresh-water expanse of modest proportions (10 km long). These were: the "**many-humped**" (greatest number of humps was 15); the **sea-horse** with mane, cow or horse's head; the "**long neck**" with a seal's head; the **giant eel** with a rounded dorsal fin; the **crocodilian** or lizard, allegedly seen on beaches; and the **giant turtle.** To these forms were added the rationalist's "**big fish**", as well as such monstrosities as the **fresh-water octopus** and the **giant snails**. Yet an analysis reveals that the extravagant long-necks, appearing in only a few reports, were a recent import, perhaps influenced by the portraits of Nessie with a long neck published by the local press. When the head of a creature was seen, the *sea-horse* and *sea-cow* were the most frequently evoked, showing the existence of a local *tradition* about such forms.

Back in Chapter One, I reproduced the interview with Donat Levasseur of Saint-Éleuthère. **[55]** Donat told me about the strange misadventure of the young swimmer who felt something nearing him under water and then "hot" jets of water along his thighs; it seemed to allude, obscurely, to a cetacean's spouting. Later, he revealed that his father, Benoît Levasseur, when he observed the lake-beast in 1922, "called it a *sea-cow*, because it had a cow's head, and *blew water from its nostrils*, and because the residents of Saint-Éleuthère are descended from the colonists at Saint-Alexandre..." **[56]**

This statement is extremely interesting, firstly because Donat established a clear relationship between the name of the monster and the origin of the present community, which can, indeed, be traced from the village of Saint-Alexandre, *close to the Saint-Lawrence*. Therefore the first settlers may have brought with them legends woven around the walrus. Secondly, people called the creature a "sea-cow" because it "blew water from its nostrils". In the past, because it was considered to be the mate of the whale, the walrus was credited with a real spout. In 1675, the German Friedrich Martens wrote that the walrus "blows water from its nostrils like a whale", and this erroneous observation was repeated by so keen an observer as James Lamont, who notes that "sea-horses" (walruses) give a "spout from their blow-holes". **[57]** This belief had been formalized in folk-culture and became a primary attribute of the fresh-water sea-cow of Pohénégamook.

Also in our first chapter we have the testimony of the wife of a local hotel-keeper, Mrs Alcide Desbiens. **[58]** Their hotel, the Pohénégamook, is near the place where, according to tradi-

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52 ■ Unpublished interview with Elzéar Sirois.

53 ■ N. Denys 1908, p350.
Father Sagard commented: "because of these teeth, our sailors call it 'the beast with big teeth'." (Sagard 1632.)

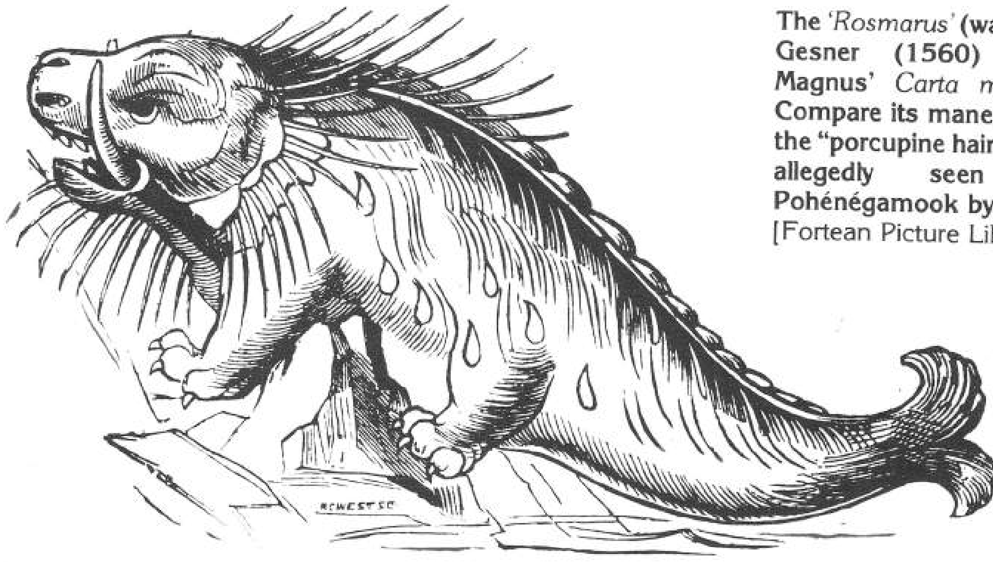
54 ■ Heuvelmans' classification: Heuvelmans 1968, Chapter 14, pp537–573.

55 ■ See Chapter 1, p43f.

56 ■ Unpublished interview with Donat Levasseur.

57 ■ J.A. Allen 1880, p99.
Compare it with the observation of a "sea horse" with "horns or ears" and *"blowing water from its nose"*, off the coast of British Columbia in 1947. (Leblond & Sibert 1973, p20.)

58 ■ See Chapter 1, p48.



The '*Rosmarus*' (walrus), copied by Gesner (1560) from Olaus Magnus' *Carta marina* (1539). Compare its mane of bristles with the "porcupine hair" of the "horse" allegedly seen in Lake Pohénégamook by Mrs Desbiens. [Fortean Picture Library]

tion, the lake extends under the mountain. In Elzéar Sirois's precis of her sighting, he says the lady saw a bizarre "horse" with an "earless cow's head". We have also learned that in Scottish legend the water-bull has *no ears*. [59] For Olaus Magnus, the sea-calf has no ears, because "had it such, they would take in much water and hinder the swimming of it". [60]

Sirois also told me that the "horse" seen by Mrs Desbiens had a "mane of tufts of long hair, exactly like a *porcupine*". [61] This corresponds to the portrait of the walrus offered by Olaus Magnus [see illustration]; his bulky creature has an ox's head and a spiky ruff of stiff sharp hairs. Magnus describes it as "hair growing as thick as straw or corn reeds". [62]

Alcide Desbiens' successors at the Hotel Pohénégamook also claimed to have witnessed the revels of the sea-cow. According to the *Montréal Star*, Rodolphe Desbiens and his wife both saw "a strange skimming blob" in 1956, which rushed towards the shore, emerging in the shallows as a hump-backed creature with a slender neck and a cow's head "with prominent nostrils, but without horns." [63] Such mentions of gaping nostrils reminds us of the blow-holes of the mythical walrus. In 1957, the next owner of the hotel, Camille Ouellet, claimed to have observed, with his cook, "a sea-cow with *two horns* on its head, and a body as large as an oil barrel." [64] And such horns put us in mind of the one preserved in the collection of rarities at Oxford and scheduled as a "sea-cow's horn". The illustrators of sea charts often represented the sea-cow as a terrestrial cow with horns and tail, like that on the map of Iceland made by Abraham Ortelius in 1585. (Ever since Pliny, naturalists have also had a tendency to transform *tusks* into *horns*.) [65]

In 1958, some journalists, trying to rationalize the sea-cow of Pohénégamook, called it a "manatee". Like Otto Fabricius long before them, they were replacing the mythical layer with an exotic but naturalistic one. Besides the sea-cow, the sea-horse is well attested in Pohénégamook lore. Various old residents told me that, "in the past", "people called the beast 'sea-cow' and also 'cheval marin' (sea-horse)." The most recent witness of the sea-horse, a lady from Saint-Éleuthère, claimed to have seen in 1967, "a horse raised in the middle of the lake,

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59 ■ See Chapter 2, p129.

60 ■ As quoted in J. Ashton 1895 [1890], p232.

61 ■ Unpublished interview with Elzéar Sirois.

62 ■ Cited in J. Ashton 1895 [1890], p236.

63 ■ James Y. Nicol, 'Deer head, shell hide: Mocking Lake monster hunted with harpoons', in *Montréal Star* 7 October 1957.

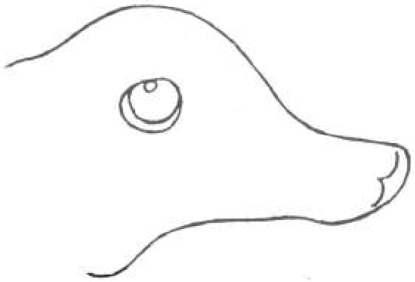
64 ■ Letter from Camille Ouellet, in *Allo Police* 6 July 1958.

65 ■ Dr. K.E. von Baer, 'Anatomische und Zoologishe Unterseechungen über das Wallross', in *Mémoires de "Académie Imperiale des Sciences ou Saint-Pétersbourg*, sixiéme série, vol 2, 1838, p101f.

Abraham Ortelius can claim to have published the first systematic atlas of the world, *Theatrum orbis terratum* (Antwerp, 1570), and like many cartographers of the period borrowed from Olaus Magnus. (Lynam 1949, p39.) Part of Ortelius' 1585 map of Iceland is reproduced on p121.

like a moose, with a slender two-foot-long neck on which stood a head like that of a horse or a cow." [**66**]

Today, at Pohénégamook, observations of the sea-horse have become the exception because they don't fit into the modern Nessie-type patterning, or the "sea-iguana" hypothesis heavily publicized in the 1970s by the local retired curate Leopold Plante. [**67**] Nevertheless, the sea-mammal association has persisted. Zénon Thibault told me about his July 1981 sighting, remarking that the monster had "a *dolphin's head*, like Flipper the TV dolphin... the creature had dark eyes as big as a fist, [they] were protruding, really popping out." [**68**] When Zénon drew what he thought he had seen, the dolphin's beak was transformed into a seal-like muzzle [see illustration].



A drawing by Zénon Thibault of the "dolphin" head he saw on Lake Pohénégamook in July 1981. [Michel Meurger]

The technical difficulties of drawing alone may not be responsible for the deviation. There is a stability in graphic rendering which is exactly what is lacking in the oral testimonies about water-monsters. When asked to make a drawing of what he has perceived, the witness often feels a great difficulty in being able to *concretize* what he has only *conceptualized*, because there is a contradiction between the extreme precision of some *details* in his deposition and the hazy character of the general form that he perceived. This suggests that, like the Norwegian *Havhest*, the Québecian lake-monsters are built from an accumulation of realistic details, woven together on the loose frame of the imagination. The sliding movement between various identities – such as between dolphin and seal – is not at random but governed by an unconscious desire to restate the original plurality of the shapes imprisoned in the concept. In other words, witnesses of lake-monsters often seem to resist an absolute definition in their drawings. Correspondingly, enhanced details seem to be more of a 'sign' – in the symbolic sense – than a zoological peculiarity, even when they are realistic. The prominent eyes of the creature seen by Zénon Thibault correspond to walruses' eyes, so large and bulging that one observer of a walrus was moved to describe them as "protruding from their sockets like those of a lobster". [**69**] Beyond the misty shape of the sea-horse and the sea-cow the details regress to those of the living animals from which they were assembled, such as the walrus.

The Pohénégamook Beast was also widely considered to be amphibious, staying underwater during the day and roaming the mountain at night, leaving tracks in its quest for food, as Miss Lavoie was told by her father. [**70**] We have seen that Jacques Cartier ascribed much the same habit to the walrus ("sea-horse") in confusing it with the hippopotamus. At Saint-Éleuthère I heard some hints about *circular* imprints, appearing sometimes on a sandy shore or on the bottom of shallow water. Elzéar Sirois called such traces "horse's tracks", stating that one can see them through the water at the mouth of the Saint-François River. They are rounded, as though made by a horse trotting along the floor of the lake. Elzéar also speculated that they might be "spawning bowls" created by fishes using their tails. [**71**]

Even if this was the case, the story is exemplary for the whole question of lake-monsters; natural phenomena are

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66 ■ Unpublished interview, name on file.

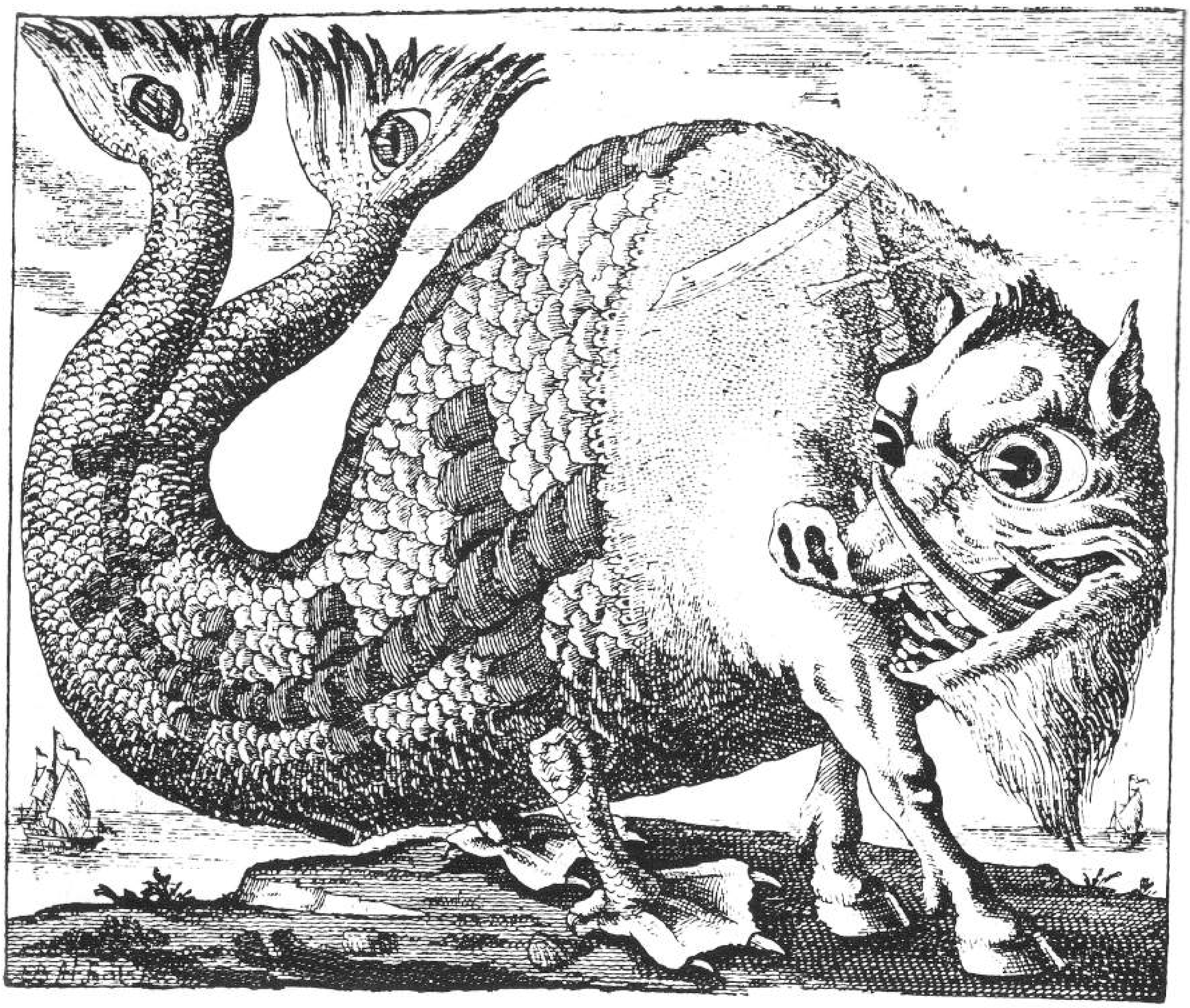
67 ■ Leopold Plante's "iguana"; see Chapter 5, p249f.

68 ■ Unpublished interview with Zénon Thibault.

69 ■ Cited in J.A. Allen 1895 [1890], p153.

70 ■ Unpublished interview with Mrs Lavoie.

71 ■ Unpublished interview with Elzéar Sirois.



This engraving from a German broadsheet published in Augsburg in 1727, gives a popular account of the difficult killing of an "awe-inspiring sea monster" near Friedrichshafen by 400 rustics and their 20 dogs.

This hybrid creature – almost certainly representing a pinniped of some kind – with its boar's head, merman's beard, fox's ears, goose's feet as well as horses hooves, and peacock's eyes in its tails, is a good example of the creation of sea monsters from the accumulation of realistic details, as are most of the images presented in this study..

From E. Hollander, *Wunder, wundergeburt, wundergestalt* **(1927).** [Fortean Picture Library]

selected according to their potential for strengthening the myth. Logically, a sea-horse must leave horse-like tracks; and correspondingly, a sea-cow needs to *graze*. [**72**] Some Pohénégamook residents, supposing that the Beast is vegetarian, took me to what they consider to be its favourite haunt, a shallow place full of algae and water-lilies.

THE DEMON HORSES OF THE AMERICAS

Some British naturalists have already suggested that the water-horses and water-bulls of Scottish Highlands and Islands folklore may have been inspired by sightings of *walruses*. A walrus was killed on the east coast of Harris in 1817, and another one in the Orkneys in June 1825. [**73**] This is extremely interesting, because the walrus may have played a big part in *localizing* and *embodying* the terrible *Each Uisge* in Scotland as elsewhere; but this is not the total explanation. The concept of the Scottish water-horse is a mythical unity built from heterogeneous elaborations of various living creatures, and the role of the real horse in this is very important. As early as 1527, Hector Boece wrote about the "many wild horses" existing "beside Loch Ness", and these wild herds may have played a part in the constitution of the *Each Uisge* legend. [**74**]

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72 ■ Consequently a sea-cow must also *low*, like the terrestrial variety. Wallowa Lake, in north-eastern Oregon, is, according to an "Indian tale" in-

There is also a big difference between the water-horse of the Highlands and the Québecian equine water-monsters. The Scottish creatures are supernatural beings endowed with the gift of shape-shifting. Above all they are *demonic lovers*, and this aspect is very old and enduring. [**75**] In the *Triads of Ireland* – a text published at the end of the 14th century, but compiled in the late Old Irish, before AD 900 [**76**] – we discover the "Beast of Lettir Dallan" which is a monster with a human head and a body like a smith's bellows. "The water-horse [*Equus aquaticus*] which resided in this lake, close to the church, made love to the daughter of the priest and sired the Beast with her." [**77**] There is also a record of a baby, as late as 1794, accused of being the son of a demon-horse, the Kelpie. [**78**] There is no hint of a similar demonic libido in the Québecian water-horse. As we will see, in French-Canadian popular tradition the *horse* was considered as one of the horrible embodiments of the Devil, and as such could vanish into rivers. In their opposition to the local priests, the water-monsters of Québec also play the part of Christian devils [**79**], they are no longer primitive demons like their Scottish cousins.

Bringing their folklore to North America, the Scots and the Irish seem to have left behind the more archaic traits of their fabulous beings. Modern Amerindians – such as the Algonkian interviewed in Chapter One [**80**] – have integrated the horse into their beliefs. The horse-headed serpent is part of their legends, but since when? Father Louis Nicolas was in New France when the Canadian Amerindian came into contact, for the first time, with this European import: the horse.

The first transportation of horses to New France took place in 1665. The *Codex Canadiensis* includes a drawing of one of these "stallions of Louis le Grand". Nevertheless, many tribes in contact with the French already knew this animal by way of the English settlers, who had imported them earlier in 1629. [**81**] The discovery of the horse, the "moose from France", did not inspire among the Canadian Indians the massive reactions of terror which were found among the Mexicans when they faced the monsters of the Conquistadors. Notably, the texts are silent concerning the impact of the introduction of this new animal upon the mental universe of the indigenous people of the continental north.

WHEN MĀORI FIRST ENCOUNTERED
HORSES THEY WERE IDENTIFIED AS 'TANIWHA'

In Spanish America, it was dread that led to the adoption of the animal into the indigenous pantheons. On the coast of the Yucatan, from the time of the first combats, as related by the chronicler Bernard Diaz del Castillo, the Indians mistook horse and rider for a single beast, a centaur. Trodden underfoot and pierced by the Toledo blades, the vanquished idealised their four-footed conquerors. A tribe in Honduras even sculpted an idol in stone representing the black steed of Cortez, the famous "El Morzillo", and created a cult of him. Deified because of the terror that the horse inspired, the new divinity itself became a source of fear, a sort of bogey-man, hence the "Black Devil", the cannibal stallion of the Shoshones. [**82**]

Finally, we note the different appearances of the "water-horses". And in this regard, we can verify to what extent reality, far from excluding the myth, prepares it and supports it. We

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[**Notes continued from previous page.**]
habited by a "big sea-cow" with cannibalistic habits. The *Wallowa County Chieftain*, of November 1885, reports that a prospector saw the head of this monster rising near his boat, with a ten-foot-long neck, a "large flat head, something *like that of a hippopotamus*"; the creature gave "a low bellow, *something like a cow*" . Mike Dash, 'The reporting of a lake monster', in *Fortean Times* N° 44 (1985), p42f.

The bellowing of the earless water-bull was well-known to the cattle-herders of Lorne, in the Scottish Highlands, who describe it as "one of the weirdest sounds" which they have ever listened, and rather "like the crowing of a cock." (A.A. MacGregor 1937, p79). The famous Scottish witch Isobel Gowdie confessed, in 1662, that it was the bellowings of the elf-bulls at the entrance to the subterranean halls of the fairies which frightened her most; and Sir Walter Scott identifies these creatures as the "water-bulls, famous both in Scottish and Irish tradition". (W. Scott 1885, p135.)

See also: Note 24, p215.

73 ■ J.A. Allen 1895 [1890], p72.

74 ■ J. Ritchie 1920, p80.

75 ■ See Chapter 2, pp124–126.

76 ■ Letter from Stuart O. Seanoir, assistant librarian, Trinity College Library, Manuscripts Department, Dublin.

77 ■ K. Meyer 1906, p37.
The same passage describes the origins of the "Third Wonder, the '*Ox* of Dil'": "*Its father came out of the same lake* [Lettir Dallan], and went upon one of the cows of the land-holder who lived near the church, and *begot the ox upon her.*" (*Triads*, ed Meyer 1906, p31.)

This is one of the oldest mentions of the water-bull's attraction to land cows. Editor Meyer adds a note that today Glen Dallan is Glencar, six miles to the north of the town of Sligo, on Ireland's western coast, where there is a little lake, now called Glencar Lough, which is connected to the sea at Rosses Point.

78 ■ E. Jones 1973 [1931], p253.

79 ■ See Chapter 5.

80 ■ See Chapter 1, p108f.

81 ■ F.G. Roe 1955.
See also: F-M. Gagnon and D. Petel 1986, pp153.

82 ■ F.G. Roe 1955.

must remember the conditions of the first observations of the fearful beast: the chroniclers described the gatherings of Indians fascinated by the Spanish cavalry crossing the rivers. [**83**] This splendid spectacle, where the reflections of the helmets and armour added a powerful heroic note, forcefully stimulated the myth of the horse while it was being constituted; we think of the famous "White Mane", which in a film is shown galloping through the waves from which it seemed to come. In America, the observation of the animal swimming has, probably, led to the belief in its amphibian character. Among a group of Gran Chaco Indians, the "Master of the Waters" appears as a knight mounted on a mythic horse. [**84**]

Going beyond geographic and cultural differences, the visionary world of the Indian united with that of the Europeans: the spirit of Gran Chaco is the brother of the terrible knight of the Austrian Lake Traun.

The tribe of the Mosquitoes, related to the Caraibes of Honduras, believed in the *Wihwin*, a horse-shaped spirit, with horrible teeth for devouring its human prey; it haunted the hills in the summer, but in winter it retired to the sea from whence it had originally come. [**85**] The Wihwin seemed to be the outcome of a mythic creation blending the terrestrial horse and the water-horse to produce a third, amphibious, species. In any case, the different aquatic horse-demons of Spanish America seemed to manifest the same gluttony for human flesh as their fellows across the Atlantic, the Kelpies.

The *Piranu* of the Argentine rivers, an enormous black fish, "with a head like that of a horse and with large eyes", liked to lurk in the water to capsize boats by ramming them and to drown all those who passed by. [**86**] These fearsome residents of the river remind us of certain descriptions of Nessie, in which the horse's head appears with globe-like eyes and black skin. It is also a twin of the monster of Lake Brompton, with its horse-like snout and the tail of a fish. And well before all other comparisons, we can find a double of the Piranu in the "sea-horse" of the *Codex Canadiensis*.

It is suitable now to pose the question: did the natives of New France integrate, in their turn, such a water-horse into their own mythology?

4.5

THE TWO STORIES OF POHENEGAMOOK

The Amerindian group which seems to have had the greatest chance to nourish these conceptions is the Abenaki Confederation, which united six tribes, including the Micmacs (of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, and northern New Brunswick), the Pentagouets–Passamaquoddies (of Maine), and their neighbours, the Abenakis. This Algonkian language sub-group occupied one of the most fertile territories for observations of water-monsters. Maned creatures were seen seen in the lakes of New Brunswick – eg. Skiff Lake [**1**] – and of Cape Breton island. What stories about the monsters could those cousins of the Micmacs, the Beothuks of Newfoundland,

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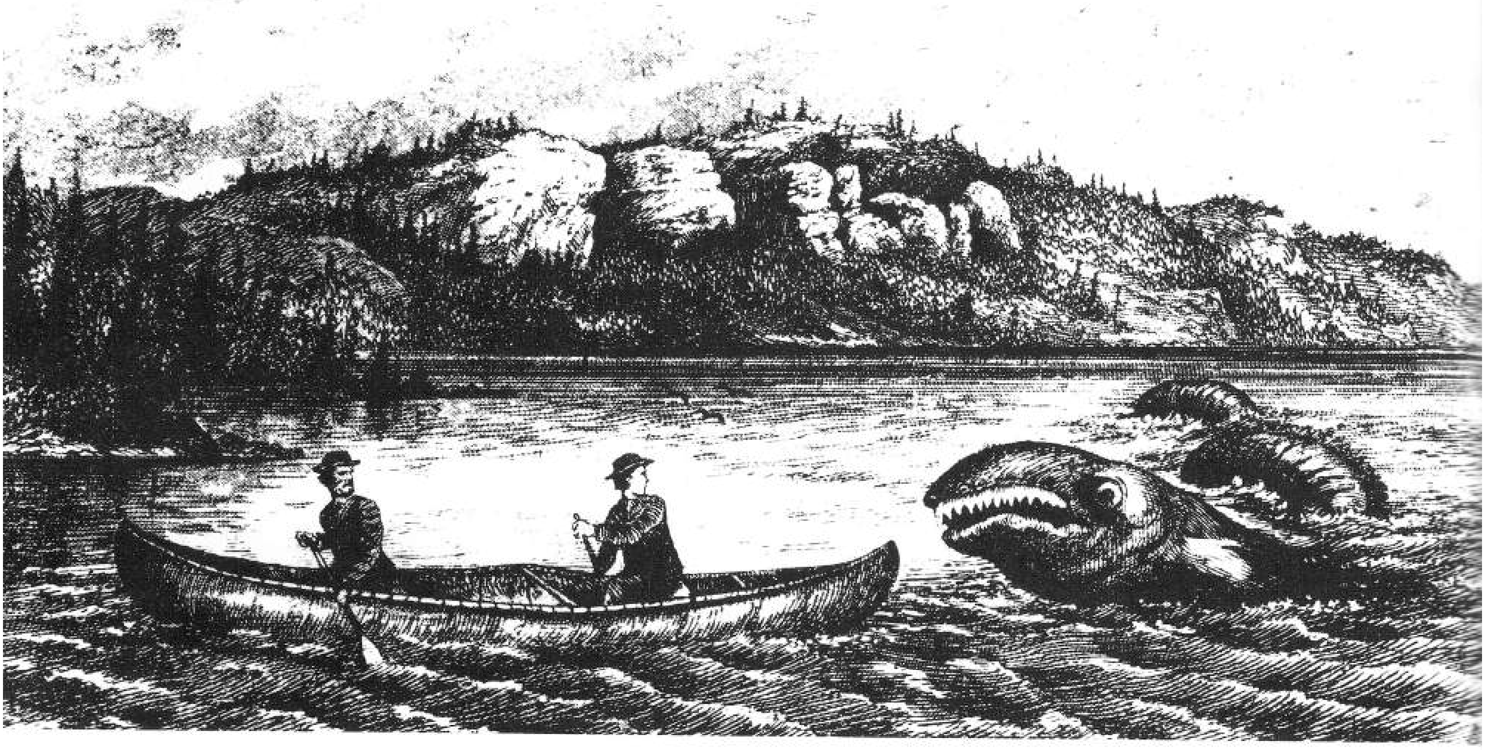
83 ■ F.G. Roe 1955.

84 ■ O. Zerries 1954.

85 ■ H. Bancroft 1875, vol 3.

86 ■ J.B. Ambrosetti 1917.

1 ■ C.M. Skinner 1889.
See also: 'Notes on sea serpents on coastal New England,' in *New York Folklore Quarterly*, vol 26, 1970.



'The monster of Lake Eutopia' - an engraving by B. Kroupa, from *Canadian Illustrated News* **(30 November 1872).** [Fortean Picture Library]

At Pohénégamook and at Lake Utopia people have tried to get rid of the monster by the same methods – large baits worthy of the appetite of Leviathan – with as little success. [**5**]

The Micmacs, who were supposed to survey these preparations with a mixture of interest, superstition and amusement, identified the inhabitant of Lake Utopia as Tcipitckaam, defined sometimes as a *unicorn serpent*, sometimes as an *alligator*, in their tradition. The haunt that they assigned him, buried inside *tree trunks in the swamp* [**6**], may even provide a third account of his origins. According to their neighbours, the Pentagouet, the Weewilmekq is "a wood worm" seized by gigantism, whose forked head rises above the turbulence of the Saint–Jean River.

An old Indian, John Newell, described the couple of Tcipitckaams that he saw in Lake Ainslie, on Cape Breton Island: "The male was black and probably longer; the other, the female, was brown. The head was shaped a little like a horse, but larger". [**7**] What resembles a horse and an alligator and a serpent all rolled into one? Answer: Ponik! [**8**] The Tcipitckaam also offers many points of similarity with the "eel–horses" of European folklore. This concordance has not escaped the attention of W.D. and R.S. Wallis, for whom the monster is "an importation from popular European culture". [**9**]

It is a fact that it appears frequently in Micmac stories containing numerous French motifs. These seem altogether excessive: the other avatars of Tcipitckaam – the unicorn–serpent and the alligator – are very widespread among the myths of other tribes, suggesting an autochthonic origin for the dragon of the Micmacs. Some elements, however, have been able to help in creating a syncretic figure. The eyes of Tcipitckaam are said to be crystals which the Micmacs avidly sought to procure for their magic, [**10**] doubtless linked to the

[5] ■ P. Costello 1974.

[6] ■ E.C. Parsons, 'Mic Mac folklore,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 38, 1925.

[7] ■ W.D. Wallis and R.S. Wallis 1955.

Throughout July 1976, there were reports of a "sea-horse-like" monster, which chased ships in the open water of Cape Sable Island (Nova Scotia); reported in *Fortean Times* N° 18, (October 1976), p17.

Additional details were recently presented by John H. Sansom, 'Fabulous Lunkers', in *Fate Magazine* (Highland Park, Illinois), March 1988, pp62–69.

[8] ■ G. Théberge 1974.

[9] ■ W.D. Wallis and R.S. Wallis 1955.

[10] ■ M. Bouteiller 1950.

meetings (therefore also cultural ones) of different Indian groups. The traditional accounts of the tribes of the Abenaki Confederation allow us to discover numerous motifs that we have already found on our lakes: and Elzéar Sirois's story about his boat lifted by "something" offers great resemblance to an Abenaki story which describes a mysterious commotion in the waters of the Etchemin River which threatened to overturn a boat. [19]

For their part, the Micmacs spoke of a "second surface of water", to be found at a certain depth, where water no longer resembled liquid. Divers who reached this level were able to live there for days. [20]

This strongly resembles the numerous "underwater chambers" of Celtic folklore [21] , and appropriately among people who have been affected by the cultural influence of the settlers in these regions. There are multiple examples of this: the groups in the Abenaki Confederation partook of a certain number of beliefs concerning the lake monsters; and these people all belonged to the large Algonkian family.

It is only by a careful examination of the mythology of this group, and of its borrowings from the Whites, that we can understand the connection between the mental universe of the Québecois lakes that we've studied and those of Europe. We believe that, by extending our research to other Algonkian tribes, we will find more pieces of the puzzle, notably among the Ojibwas. They situate the habitat of their monsters, "half–serpents, half–fish", in caverns "*in the interiors of mountains*", near the lakes. Underground passages connect these caverns to the water. One of these serpents has its lair in a hill to the north of the old portage route through Lake Simcoe. [22]

This is a locale similar to the supposed cavern of Ponik under the "Montagne de la Croix", which is said to connect both to Lake Pohénégamook and to Lake Témiscouata. The Ojibwa legend provides the monster of Lake Simcoe – "Igopogo", about whom we have recent testimonies [23] – with a labyrinth comparable to that of Ponik.

A detailed investigation would probably bring to light other hollowed mountains in Canada. Whatever the original contribution of the Indians, these ideas have found an extraordinary reception in the logging camps. Let us recall that it was in such a place that Elzéar Sirois learned, for the first time, of the existence of Ponik.

The cabins of the loggers, in nearby Maine, sheltered, in 1851, not only Indians, but Irish, Québecois, Swedes and Norwegians. [24] In the evening, in front of the fire, their daytime fears were associated with fantastic beings, which each one of these cultures carried in its collective mind, and the weight of the forest reality was heavier on their shoulders than the fatigue of their work. A new mythology was forming, bringing together a hundred contributions, unified by one single anguish, the immense monotony of the trees.

Québecois specialists in stories of werewolves remembered the "Beast of Kamouraska", almost next door. In order to exorcise the terrors of the forest monsters, the

19 ■ H.L. Masta 1932.

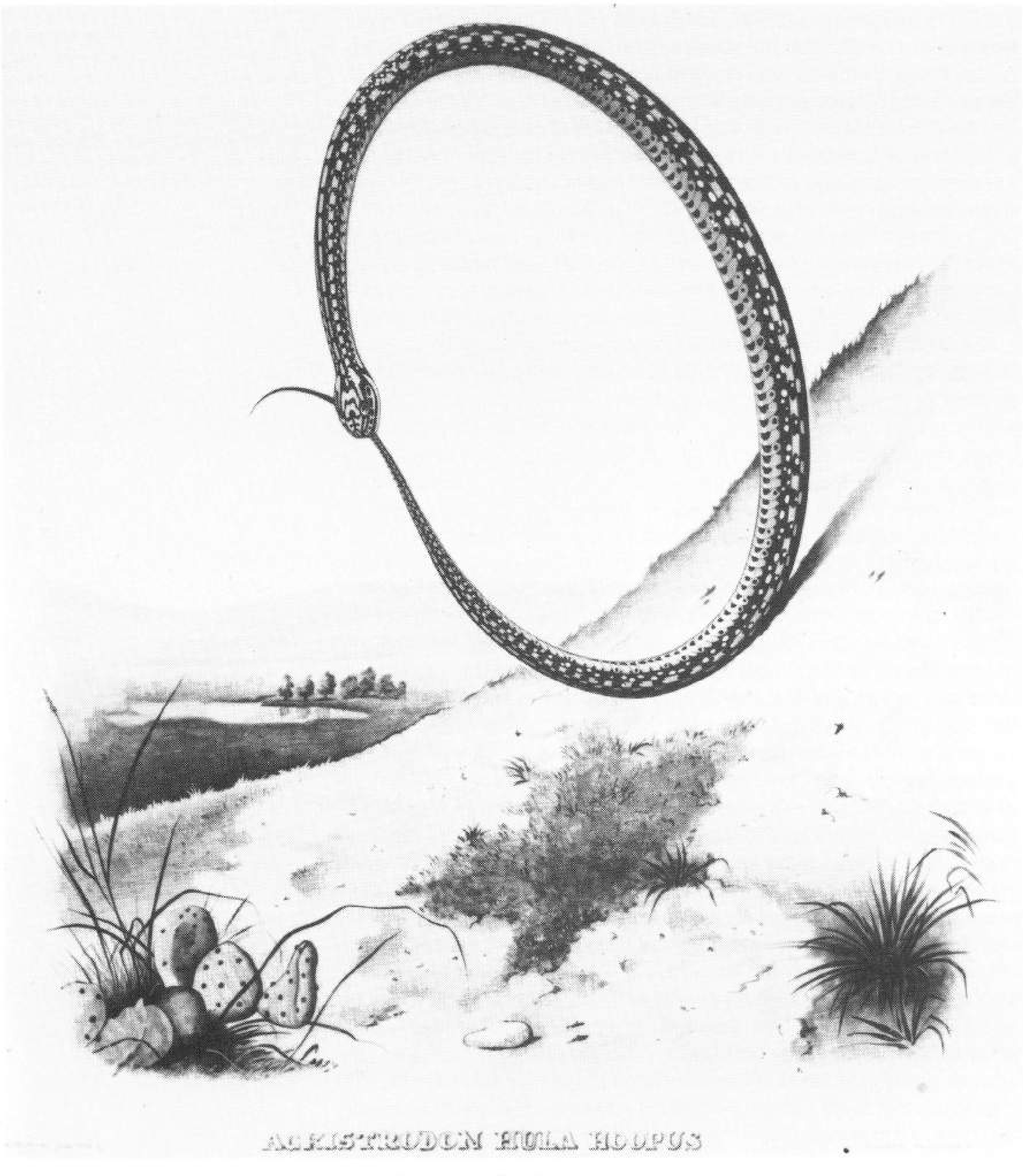
20 ■ W.D. Wallis and R.S. Wallis 1955.

21 ■ George Laidlaw, 'Certain Ojibwa myths,' in *Annual Archæological Report* (Toronto), 1914.

22 ■ P. Costello 1974.

23 ■ H.P. Beck 1957.

24 ■ W.T. Cox 1910.



'The Hoop Snake' (1986) - a painting by Wayne McLoughlin in the style of Audubon. [Courtesy of Wayne McLoughlin ©]

lumberjacks finally created their own menagerie of monsters, with telescopic legs and snouts shaped like musket barrels, which shoot clay bullets at sleeping loggers. The "Hodag" and the "Whimpus" and other tamed deliriums [25], are terrors which they preferred to sculpt and polish than to see them suddenly grimacing in the woods. The ambience of the evenings was eminently teratogenic. Moreover, dead loggers themselves became monsters, like the *Skadegamutc* of the Micmacs, the shrieking devil, who followed solitary travellers, always disappearing behind tree trunks. [26]

Satan had also followed the pioneers from Old France. When they wanted to establish a parish, a black horse presented itself to transport the stones for the church. When they had gone quite some distance, he vanished into the water. In the region of the lower Saint–Lawrence, the country of Pohénégamook, as far as Trois–Pistoles, people often spoke of the "disappearing horse in serpent form which went into the river". [27]

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[25] ■ W.D. Wallis and R.S. Wallis 1955.

[26] ■ J.C. Dupont 1978.

The "mutilated horse" of the Saint–Éleuthère resident, seen near the place where the lake "enters underground", finds there an entrance into Hell.

4:6

THE GREAT SERPENT OF THE SORCERERS

"They showed me, on a scrap of bark or of paper, demons unleashed, greatly different from my own drawings"
Father Paul Le Jeune (1591–1664).

Selwyn Dewdney showed that, according to the Ojibwa, the supreme God was identified with the terrible, evil water–lynx. [1] In the Omaha pantheon of water–monsters, the tutelary spirit Wakandagi was renamed "*Wakandagi pezi*" ("the Evil Monster") and was assimilated with the devil. [2]

The Jesuits of the Huron mission were familiar with a similar belief. The conditions of the telling are important in themselves. In 1647–48, Father Paul Raguenau wrote one of the *Relations Annuelles* (*Annual Accounts*), at the same time a report and a publicity tool, such as they were in 1632. He was at Sainte–Marie of the Hurons, on the River Wye, near the present city of Midland, Ontario. His letters are overshadowed by the Iroquois menace, which took the form of more and more murderous raids. In that year (1632), the martyrdom of Fathers Brébeuf and Lallemant had was only one year away, and at Sainte–Marie, the tribes coming to market spoke of burned churches and of the faithful, riddled with arrows.

Thinking of that "Ancient Serpent" of the Christians, the Devil, whose claw he saw in recent events, Father Raguenau described the serpent of the Amerindian sorcerers: "The Hurons believe that there is a type of monstrous serpent, which they call *Angont*, and which carries maladies, death, and almost all of the sorrows of the world with him. They say that the monster lives in underground places, in caverns, under some rocks, in the woods and the mountains, but *ordinarily in lakes and rivers*. It is, they say, the flesh of this frightful serpent which the sorcerers use to kill those on whom they wish to cast their spell, rubbing with this venomous flesh, whatever it is: a leaf from the area, a tuft of hair, a piece of leather or of wood, a claw from some animal, or other similar things; as these things are rubbed in this ointment, they receive evil powers which they cause to penetrate to the depths of the man's entrails, into his most vital parts, even to the marrow of his bones, bringing with it sickness and pain, which consume and kill those who are thus overtaken, unless, by some opposing power, some means is found to retrieve these things to which the spell is attached." [**3**]

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[27] ■ The inhabitants of the islands in the Saint-Lawrence River are very familiar with the black horses. One of them was seen on the *Île-aux-Grues* [Crane Island] "running flat out along the road" by Pierre Gatien Lachaine and Antoine Lajoie. They saw the charger run "at the same devilish speed to the banks" and suddenly "throw itself in and disappear". See: D. Potvin 1945.

[1] ■ S. Dewdney 1975.

[2] ■ R.F. Fortune, 'Omaha secret societies,' in *Columbia University Contributions in Anthropology* (NY), vol 14, 1932.

The Hurons of the 17th century believed in an amphibious serpent similar to that of the Algonkians, whose skin was the necessary ingredient for the noxious power of the sorcerer's projectiles. Among other tribes, *the horn* of the monster was endowed with this quality by direct contact: when touched with a fragment of the antler of Weewilmekq, a tree rotted in the ground, and a person would grow old before your eyes. [**4**] Horn or skin, the basic concept is the same: *the lake monster is considered to be the patron of evil magic.* At the time of initiation into the Omaha brotherhood of the lake monsters, Wakandagi is believed to throw one of his magic arrows into the body of a neophyte, conferring on him the power to project similar objects against his enemies. [**5**]

Angont, a master of spells, is not therefore an isolated conception. The fact that this tradition has been transmitted in 1647 is highly significant. It is the Indian justification of the terrible scourge brought by the Whites: smallpox. Accompanied by typhus, it reduced the 30,000 Hurons to 12,000 between the years 1637 and 1639, attacking principally the aged, the guardians of the ancestral culture. [**6**]

The gulf between the old and the new was increased by the missionaries who, in contrast to the belief of the Indians in a beyond where they could find themselves reunited with their family, taught them that only the baptised would be able to go to Heaven. In a society such as the Huron tribe, whose spiritual beliefs rested on lines of parentage and the cult of the dead and who had great funeral celebrations, this teaching could only have had tragic consequences. In Peru, Indians were taught that those who died without prayers would not reach Paradise, that they would be bound in Hell. The indigenous customs of the past were "diabolised" [**7**] along with its representatives, the shaman, the "sorcerer", and the "juggler", according to the code of the Jesuits.

The *Relations* are a fundamental source on the status of the shamans, who, during the great epidemic, went from village to village where people were ravaged by the sickness, organising ritual dances in which "all the dancers were disguised as hunchbacks with wooden masks" in order to chase away the demons of the sickness. [**8**]

One of these shamans, Sondacouané, received a visit from the spirits after having fasted for seven days: "We come here to bring you *into association with us*; we are *demons. It is we who have ruined the country with the infection*... But now we want to have pity on the country and for you to join with us to heal this epidemic".

One demon, "the most evil of all, that of *Ondichaouan*, which is a large island which we see from here," appeared to him. "This demon is like a fire. It is he who keeps the cadavers of those who drown in the Great Lakes and brings about the storms and tempests in whose darkness he destroys the canoes." [**9**] This island demon is the master of contagion. The shaman goes from village to village, offering remedies which

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[3] ■ Jesuits 1647–1648.

[4] ■ C. Leland 1884.

[5] ■ R.F. Fortune, 'Omaha secret societies,' in *Columbia University Contributions in Anthropology* (NY), vol 14, 1932.

[6] ■ L. Heidenreich 1971.

[7] ■ P. Duviols 1971.

[8] ■ Jesuits 1637.

[9] ■ *ibidem*.

the smallpox spirits have taught him. His arrival signifies a renewal of magic practices of the past, a return to paganism. The faithful also put masks and straw dolls at the doors of their houses for protection. The Jesuits fought with all their strength against this traditional healing and its practitioners; efforts which were finally crowned with success: "the songs and the drums of the sorcerers lost their credibility... The sorcerers only dared to care for the sick at night." [**10**]

These shamans, whom the Jesuits denounced before their own people as servants of the devil, survived only in a precarious nocturnal life. The tradition of their two callings – as casters of spells, and also as healers of evil caused by them or by demons with which they are in association – disappeared. There remained only a fraction of them, the *Oky-Ontatechiata*, "those who kill by evil means"; purely negative beings. [**11**] A veritable witch-hunt for sorcerers, analogous to the European persecution, was let loose among the Hurons: one of them was accused by his neighbours of being a "sorcerer and poisoner". "Some people said that they had seen him prowling around the cabins spewing flames from his mouth". [**12**] An old woman, simply under suspicion, was drawn into a trap and summarily beaten with blows of an axe: "Some people said that she named some of her *accomplices*, others said that she spoke only in general, saying that they were all agreed never to betray each other in case someone was taken." [**13**]

The belief in a mysterious secret society of casters-of-spells and poisoners was constituted among the Hurons as an explanation for the epidemic, as in medieval France people believed that an alleged conspiracy of lepers, Jews, and Saracens had been the source of the plague. [**14**] The concept of a mythic sorcerers' society, possessors of an irremediable poison, such as reigned in Europe in the 17th century, was strongly implanted among the Hurons in 1637. At the end of the last century, a researcher discovered these ideas flourishing among the brother enemies of the Hurons, the Iroquois, who pointed out to him the cabin on the reserve where the witches gathered: one of them vomiting flames. [**15**]

It remains to ask whether the myth of Angont, such as we know it, has not undergone European influences. Father Raguenau, who made himself its transmitter, was a believer in the existence of sorcerers among the inhabitants of New France. [**16**] His informant was a visionary nun, Catherine de Saint-Augustin, who even named the place of a sabbat. In the same milieu, in Europe, a possessed nun admitted, in 1611, that at the sabbath "one disguised the idols of the gentiles: I and the others worshipped them for our God and Creator and offered them incense". [**17**]

Some of these idols had "the appearance of *serpents* and *dragons*". These fantasies are nourished by illustrations of the Apocalypse: the adoration of the "Beast coming from the sea", of a dragon and of the Anti-Christ. [**18**] The Inquisition carried these ideas in its baggage to New Spain, where they were superimposed upon the indigenous gods. It is therefore not surprising to meet, in a witchcraft trial in South America, at Tucuman, judged in 1761, this relation of Angont: an Indian

Opposite: **Father Raguenau's "lake serpent"** *Angont*, **as interpreted by a modern American artist, Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating a scene from 'The Black Arrow', a story by Jamieson Wood, featured on the cover of** *Fantastic Adventures* **(June 1948). "The huge, repulsive, slimy, periscopic head... with his flint-hard giant** *horn*... **" (p66).**

THE FINAL MONSTER

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10 ■ Jesuits 1639.

11 ■ E. Tooker 1964.

12 ■ Jesuits 1637.

13 ■ *ibidem*.

14 ■ J. Trachtenberg 1944.

15 ■ Smith de Cost, 'Witchcraft and demonism of the modern Iroquois,' in *Journal of American Folklore*, vol 1, 1888.

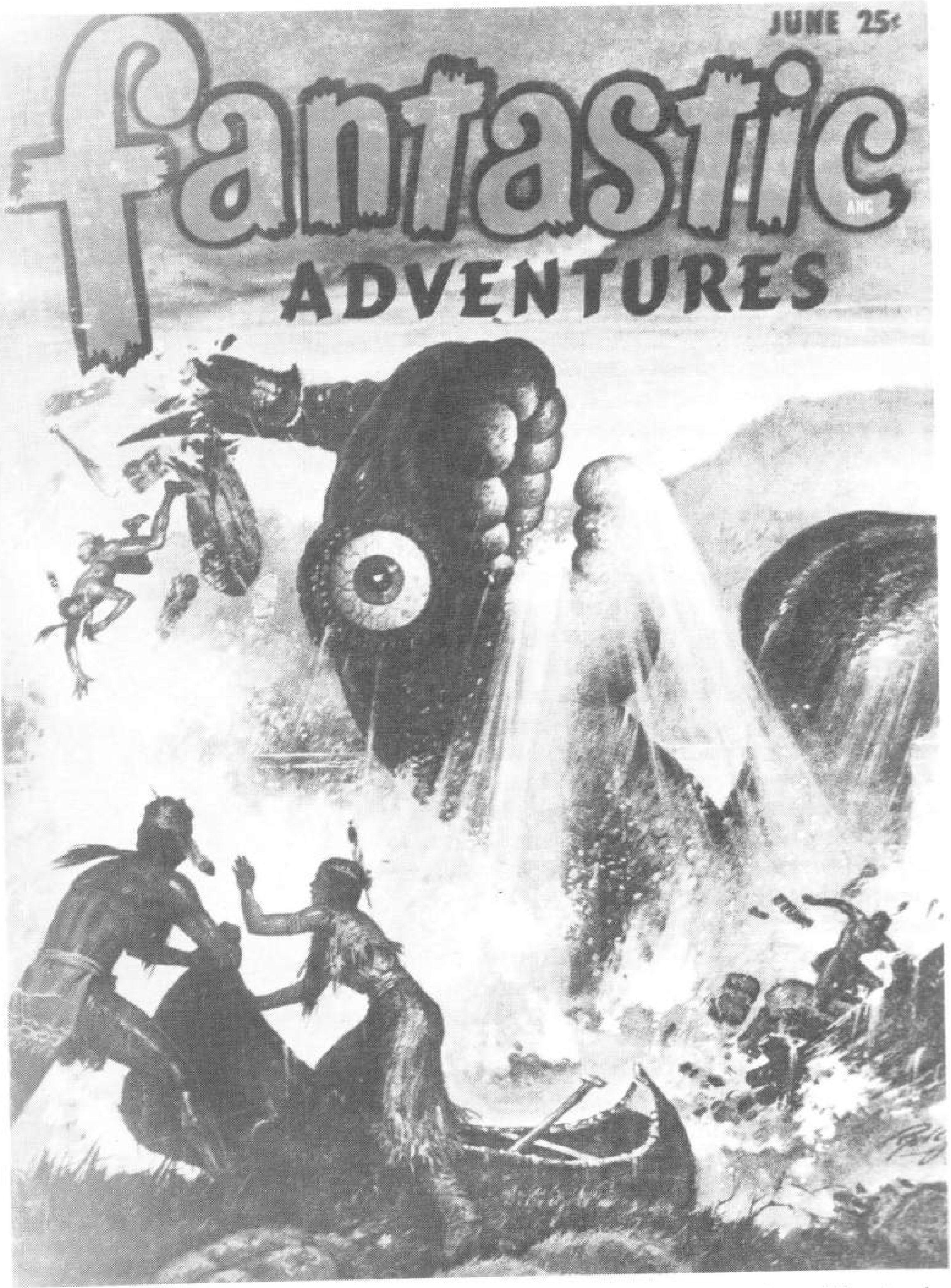
Philippe Aubert de Gaspé describes a witch's sabbath on Orleans Island, during which " the flames which lit the island like broad daylight" came out of the participants' eyes. See: P.A. de Gaspé, 'Une nuit chez les Sorciers,' in Anon 1863.

This theme, familiar in Europe, has its Amerindian equivalent. For French references see: Delcambre 1948, vol 1.

16 ■ R-L. Séguin 1971.

17 ■ Le Normant de Chirémont 1623.

18 ■ V.E. van de Meer 1979.



woman admitted that, with her companions, "they took off their clothes and saw a large serpent, which darted out its tongue while looking at them; and that it gave her companion a paper with powders, which was closed with a coloured lace and hair; the powders were to cause death when mixed with food or drink." [19] Here, as among the Hurons, the cause of deaths and of sickness proceed from the Great Serpent, but the Indian model of the venomous skin has been changed for the powder distributed by the devil of the European sabbaths. [20]

The faith which the tribes had in their pictographs, the "doubles" of the Great Serpents, agents of the creatures rep-

19 ■ T. Rosenberg 1946.

20 ■ Michel Meurger, 'Plantes des sorcières et rationalisme,' in *Revue Métapsychique* (Paris), N° 28, March 1981.

resented, just missed playing a deadly role among the Jesuits of New France. In their offensive of "conversion by images" [21] the Jesuits presented the Hurons with a drawing destined to frighten them, and this happened in 1637, at the moment when the epidemic was in full force. "The day of the baptism of Pierre Tsioven Daentaha, we showed a very beautiful picture of the judgment where the damned are depicted, some with snakes and dragons which tore their entrails, and most with some sort of instrument of torture. Several drew some profit from seeing this, nevertheless some were persuaded that this multitude of desperate men, piled one on top of the other, were those whom we had killed that winter; that the flames represented the ardour of the pestilential fever, and *that these dragons and serpents were the venomous beasts with which we poisoned them*" [22]

More correctly formulated, it seems that the observers of the painting had seen the dragons as representations of their Angont, a dynamic, magical image, now in the service of the Jesuits. As Raymond Cartier expresses it; the natives "came to be of the mind that *the plague came from the nostrils of the dragon*". [23] The converted Hurons finally polarised the old faith in the figure of the horned serpent, the antithesis of the Christian God. Those holding stubbornly to paganism adore this cycle of legends.

H. Hale collected the following version of it. [24] When the missionaries wanted to convert the Hurons, some refused to accept baptism. Among them, a young warrior called Tijaiha. One day he was hunting near the Huron River, and he noticed that in a zone of deep water a violent *bubbling* indicated the presence of a living being. Realising that it was a powerful beast, he fasted ten days to prepare to meet him. At the end of this time, he prayed that the creature would confer upon him a bit of his power, and a voice came from the waves asking him what he wanted. He responded: "The power to exterminate all of my enemies." The voice replied that it could satisfy his wish only upon *the sacrifice of one of his children*. After a long negotiation, Tijaiha bargained to deliver only his mother-in-law.

The following night the warrior was told that he must prepare a cedar arrow, which he must shoot at the creature as it emerged from the gulf, and draw from it a few drops of blood. This liquid, once in his possession, would render him invincible. But beware! This blood being a mortal poison, he must first prepare an antidote with a plant which the spirit named. The preparations concluded, Tijaiha, quiver on his back, came to the wells of the river.

The waters parted to show "the head of a great horned serpent with opened jaws and sparkling eyes". The arrow touched its neck and the Huron gathered the blood in a vessel, but before he could get back home, the effect of the venom rendered him almost blind; and in the meantime, the mother-in-law died. His companions held him responsible for this sudden death and he had to seek shelter among his hereditary enemies, the Iroquois. Tijaiha, now Tijaiha-the-Sorcerer, a deserter to his tribe, led the enemy against the members of his immediate family and killed them. In the avenging expedition which followed, the guilty were killed to the last one, except

21 ■ F.M. Gagnon 1975.

22 ■ Jesuits 1937.

23 ■ R. Cartier 1956.

24 ■ H. Hale, 'Huron folklore,' in *Journal of American Folklore* vol 2, 1889.

Tijaiha, protected by his sachet of monster blood, and who was only beaten when a Huron opened his heart with a sword.

This story presents one of the most orthodox scenarios of the acquisition of war powers from the lake monster. In other variants, the shaman causes the beast to emerge from the waters and cuts off its *horns*. Mostly it is a matter of its blood: the Kwakiutls of British Columbia taught themselves, like Tijaiha, to collect the blood of their Sisiutl, the sea-serpent with two heads. The blood had such a force that a baby bathed in it was changed into a stone. **[25]** The evil character of Tijaiha's pact is as consistent with Indian tradition, and so is the price that he paid for his contract.

A young Menomini (central Algonkian) fasted to obtain a vision of a spirit, which would be his protector. Despite all his efforts to have the aid of the good *manitous*, "*Misikinubick*, the *horned serpent, black and furry*, which regularly appeared to him, *offered him a sorcerer's power*, which the adolescent was finally obliged to accept. The monster demanded that he wait until he had reached forty years of age before using his powers. *He had to pay for them by the sacrifice of his two daughters, whom he drowned*. From this moment he could mutilate, ruin, or kill his enemies, thanks to his guardian spirit". **[26]**

There is even the assassination of the young by an aquatic monster, the patron of the Ojibwa visionaries **[27]**, among whom the spirit is said to couple with his protege in the form of a beautiful individual of the opposite sex. In the entire cultural region of the Abenakis, the task of the spirit was also to kill the trappers and ruin their work. **[28]** The most powerful shamans could assure themselves of the services of creatures as fearful as that observed by several Penobscot Indians when they spied on the shaman John Neptune. On the shores of a lake "he sang, sang until an immense eel emerged from the waters and came crawling next to him; he took its head in his hands, drumming on it softly". In this way he cemented the link between the beast and himself.

What then distinguishes the experience of Tijaiha from that of his colleagues? It is that the Huron sorcerer is a *pariah*, isolated from his community – not by his crimes, nor even by his impious alliance with the beast from the waters – but because this community has broken its ties with the archaic mental universe which Tijaiha symbolises. Consistent with the old values, even the most dangerous for the community, it is anachronistic in the milieu of Christian Hurons. The cedar arrow which the horned serpent made him construct is an index of an ancient rite, the ritual of a secret society, such as was practised among the clans of the Lion and of the Serpent of the Huron–Wyandots.

One other legend "diabolises" these clans: on the banks of the Huron River, near Lake Erie, a band of Wyandots was attracted by the phenomena of a sulphurous pond, where a curious bubbling was followed by a lightning bolt and thunder rolling on the waves. These Indians offered necklaces and belts to the hidden spirit. They called to "the Sorcerer of the deep". A white panther emerged. They wounded it with an arrow. A secret brotherhood formed, who shared little pouches of

25 ■ M. Barbeau 1953.
Sometimes horn and blood are confounded: the blood of the unicorn-serpent of the Iroquois is taken from his horn, and makes children who drink it ill. See: Beauchamp 1922.

26 ■ A. Skinner, 'Menomini associations and ceremonials,' in *Anthropological Papers* (American Museum of Natural History), vol 13, 1913.

27 ■ R. Landes 1968.

28 ■ F.G. Speck, *Penobscot shamanism*, American Anthropological Association, Memoir N° 6.

monster's blood. The blood worked for them, procuring plentiful hunts and bringing misfortune to their adversaries. The Catholic priest of Detroit asked them to get rid of this substance, "which comes to you from the devil, by one of his emissaries, in the form of a panther". They continued their witchcraft with the dried blood, allied themselves with the enemies of their race, the Senecas, and killed two women of their own tribe.

In the first decade of the 19th century, the faithful of the White Panther made themselves scarce, and were the object of a systematic persecution: all Wyandots suspected of belonging to a fraternity were killed on the spot if they refused to give up their magic pouch. In this way the last members disappeared. [**29**] Whatever doubts one might entertain as to the existence of such a secret society among the Huron–Wyandots [**30**], its resemblance to similar societies known in our time, like that of the "Water-panther" of the Potawátomis, is very clear. [**31**]

The common theme in the stories of Tijaiha and of the brotherhood of the White Panther shows, beside the common identity of these creatures, an identity recognised by researchers. [**32**] They share the tragic destiny of the last disciples of the water-monsters: they were trapped and exterminated as renegades to their tribes. The value attached to the blood of the Panther and the Horned Serpent raised it to the rank of a counter-Eucharist. In New Spain, this counter-ritual was openly *practised*, if one can believe the theologian Jacinto de la Serna who, in the middle of the 17th century, told of hardened pagans replacing the bread in their rites with a hallucinogenic mushroom and the wine with mescal. [**33**]

Such concepts were not entirely absent from the thought of the Hurons of New France. When Father Brébeuf was tortured, the renegades doused the priest with boiling oil in a parody of the ceremony of baptism. [**34**] But we cannot generalise from a particular case of people forced into apostasy by their fear of torture, to even a limited group of this community.

THE TREE OF DREAMS

In the cycle of legends about the Jesuits of Lorette, collected by Marius Barbeau [**35**], the tradition of the Great Serpent furnished, however, the last metamorphosis of the fearful Angont. After the destruction of the Hurons [**36**] under the blows of the Iroquois, the fugitives found refuge in what became the territory of Lorette in December 1673. Another Jesuit, Father Chaumonot, in order to realise a vow, initiated the worship of Our Lady of Lorette in the following year. The place very quickly became a centre for pilgrims in an atmosphere of miracles and extreme fervour among the unhappily uprooted. It was at Lorette, in 1816, that P.A. de Gaspé heard the legend of the Great Serpent of Carcajou. [**37**]

A miscreant Otsitsot called Carcajou ["Glutton"], who "sold everything but his shirt to buy fire-water", mocked the visions of the Virgin seen by those who went to sleep under the Tree-of-Dreams on the bank of Saint-Charles River. As a challenge, he installed himself in the shade of the sacred tree. Suddenly he heard "a noise in the forest, as if a fearfully heavy

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29 ■ C.M. Barbeau 1915.

30 ■ W. Lindig 1970.

31 ■ J.H. Howard, 'When they worship the Underwater-Panther,' in *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, vol 16, 1960.

32 ■ W. Lindig 1970.
See also: S. Dewdney1975; and J.H. Howard, 'When they worship the Underwater-Panther,' in *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, vol 16, 1960.

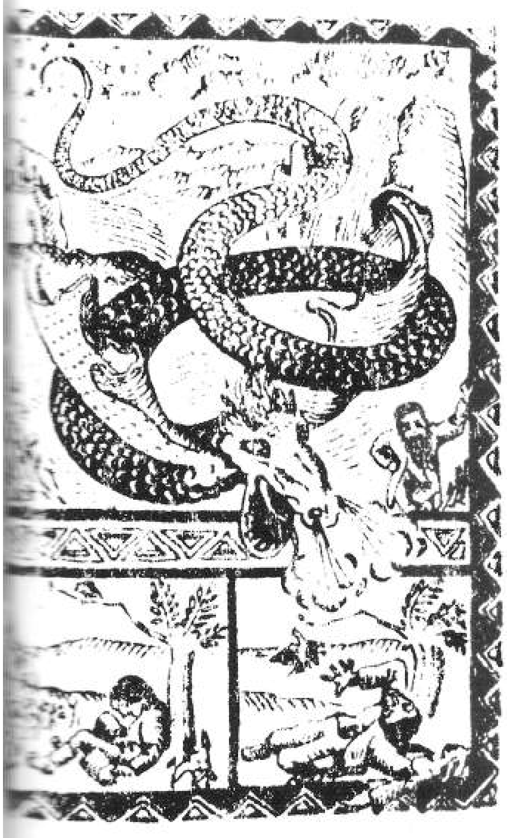
33 ■ D.G. Brinton 1894.
See also: P. Duviols 1971.

34 ■ R. Cartier 1956.

35 ■ C.M. Barbeau 1915.

36 ■ L. Heidenreich 1971.

37 ■ *Le Foyer Canadien*, vol 4.



The legend of Carcajou. A Huron called Carcajou prays that his jug of whisky should fill itself up. To his surprise a large serpent appears and suggests he should stake his soul against the whisky. Drawing by Arthur Price; from M. Barbeau, *The tree of dreams* **(1955).**

body was passing, crashing trees and bushes wherever it went". A heavy body plunged into the river, a few feet from Carcajou and everything fell into silence. "*A great light* on the river dazzled him for an instant and he suddenly saw that *this light came from the eyes of a Great Serpent*, whose head was raised ten feet above the water. This reptile had a *long mane, like a horse*, and as it shook it, out fell *bits of flame* which sparkled like a burning pine".

The creature introduced itself as follows: "I am the little *manitou* which the ancient Hurons worshipped, and my voice, when I am angry, brings an upheaval in the lake water and the rivers." Carcajou retorted: "The Black Robes tell us that the little *manitou* of our fathers is the devil of the Christians". Promises and menaces on the part of the Serpent followed: "I will bathe myself every day in the Oriadenrak (the Saint-Charles River)", growled the serpent, "and your village will neither diminish nor grow".

Finally, Carcajou worshipped the monster. In exchange, he had "every day, in his tobacco pouch, a bottle of fire-water which was never empty", endless silver, and he had relations with "all the libertines of the township". On his death bed, repentant, he called for the missionary, who arrived too late. Marius Barbeau believes this legend "was created by the encounter of two civilisations". **[38]** Carcajou represents the Trickster, the hero of the whole Amerindian cycle of legends. Carcajou, like the glutton whose name he bears, is a great eater. He is, besides, like the Trickster, pretentious and maladroit; he sometimes provides magic powers. **[39]**

Carcajou of Lorette chose a protecting spirit who appeared to him under the Christian guise of the tempter. This is the result of an assimilation of the aquatic Great Serpent with the snake of the Garden of Eden legend. Already, in 1641, among the puritan neighbours of New England, Obediah Turner, learning of the alleged apparition of a sea-serpent in the waters of Cape Ann, exclaimed: "I pray to God that it is not the Ancient Serpent of which the scriptures speak, which tempted our grandmother Eve and whose poison torments us still." **[40]**

The relation between the water-monster and the 'inexhaustible bottle' has many senses. It can be linked to the bubbling, a signal of the presence of the reptile, and the lightning bolt on the river. In the union of the two elements which it manifests, coming from the water, mane burning, the Serpent of the Saint-Charles River recalls two Aztec serpents, masters of the burning water: *Quetzalcoatl*, whose hieroglyph signifies "burning water" **[41]** and especially *Tlaloc*, the god of the caverns, the master of the lightning bolt, represented by the mescal jar and bubbling hemp beer. **[42]** The ritual of the manufacture of mescal itself suggests a libation of the liqueur on the hearth and an invocation to the God of intoxication. **[43]**

Carcajou's life became full of feasting from the moment he rediscovered his old faith; this is a common motif of the nostalgic (and guilty) visions of the Indians. Among the Ojibwa, an old man, afflicted with catalepsy, recounted how he had wanted to enter the Heaven of the Whites, from which he had

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38 ■ M. Barbeau 1957.

39 ■ P. Radin 1958. See also: R. Savard 1972.

40 ■ R.M. Dorson 1946.

41 ■ L. Séjourné 1956.

42 ■ H. Beyer 1965, vol 10.

43 ■ D.G. Brinton 1894.

been chased, and how he was unable to penetrate into the seducing "paradise of the Red Man", the place of rejoicing, because he had become Christian. [**44**] In Peru, the devil appeared in a village in the guise of an "*enormous serpent which could be seen drinking and dancing* in the midst of the Indians". [**45**]

A continuing tradition of the "Old Serpent" still haunts Lorette. P.A. de Gaspé adds to his account: "The tradition of the Great Serpent is still alive among the Indians of young Lorette. Paul Tahourhencé ["Daybreak"] told me recently that, one morning, the old members of his tribe had followed tracks made by a Serpent which had passed through their village during the night, but that they had lost them on the pebbles of the Saint-Charles River about one *arpent* away from their church; and that the track that it had made on the earth resembled that which an enormous pine tree, being dragged, would have left."

The poison of the Serpent Tempter is identified strongly in very catholic New France with alcohol; Carcajou, dying alone, is damned, like the drunk to whom the Church refuses burial in consecrated ground. [**46**] At Lorette, the expression "Mary vanquished the serpent" refers to the sinuous serpents of privately-distilled alcohol. Finally the Jesuits decided to definitively remove the Great Serpent *Oyaleroweck*'s lair in the waterfalls behind the village; he was heard hissing behind the curtain of waters. There, *a great cavern* under the peak of the hill went down into the bed of the river. A Jesuit priest announced to his men to be ready, their guns loaded; the women and children locked themselves into their homes. The missionary went to exorcise the monster.

In front of the waterfall, after the Jesuit recited his conjuring prayers, the Great Serpent showed his head at the opening of the cavern; the priest made him come all the way out, and during the night the monster crawled along the principal street of Lorette on his way to Lake Tantaré [Lake Saint-Joseph], "where he still can be found because many people have seen him on different occasions". (The old have seen his body entirely out of the water and have been terrified. He is said to be as wide as a tree trunk and 30 feet long.) Barbeau's informant recalled that the people of Lorette "believed sometimes that they heard the serpent hissing in Lake Laurent, at the end of Lake Saint-Charles". [**47**]

Once again we find a cavern connected to the water, as at Pohénégamook, at Lake Simcoe and doubtless many other places too. At Loch Ness, also, they had recourse to exorcism; without great success, it seems. [**48**] The expulsion of the reptile of Lorette, who loved to hide himself far from human habitation, offers a sacred parallel to the mythic raids of the monster from noisy Lake Aylmer to the wild Lake Saint-François. But here, the mystical expulsion has dwindled into a change of habits; the evil serpent of Lorette had been removed from the inhabited place and banished into the wilderness. The Jesuit accomplished the same task as Bishop Gudmund at Lagarfljöt in Iceland, and as St. Patrick with the snakes of green Erin. "That which lives at the bottom is not good" say the shore-dwellers, who would prefer to let it sleep.

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44 ■ R. Allier 1925, vol 1.
According to Jesuit writings, entranced Hurons would describe their journey to the Christian heaven. It sometimes appeared to them to be a place of torture, or where Amerindians are refused food and not allowed to go fishing or get married. See: Tooker 1964.

45 ■ P. Duviols 1971.

46 ■ C.M. Barbeau 1915.

47 ■ *ibidem*.

48 ■ Alexander 1978.
See also: Chapter 1, p107.

CHAPTER 5

AN ESSAY OF EVALUATION

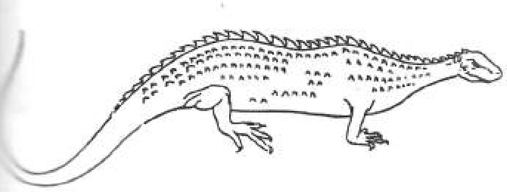
LAKE MONSTER TRADITIONS AS A BRIDGE TO LOCAL HISTORY

We have seen that for both cryptozoologists and sceptics alike, individual sightings are simply hostages of a positive or negative demonstration. One over-estimates or discredits a sighting according to one's own concept of plausibility. Sightings are commonly accepted at the judicial level, and individual testimony is investigated according to the prevailing code of admissibility; therefore the literature on lake monsters is largely dependent upon facticity.

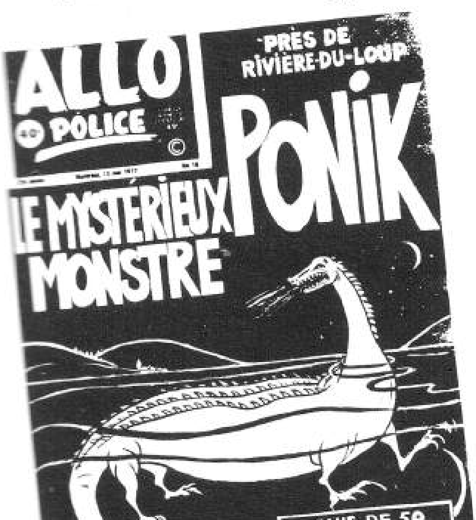
FACTICITY

"FICTIONAL OBJECTIVITY"

In my introductory essay I gave the grounds for refuting this methodology. Sceptics and believers alike *choose*, from the start, to dispute degrees of objectivity, yet they have not seriously examined the nature of this specific 'objectivity'. In fact an objective phenomenology, especially in the case of monsters, serves as proof only of a traditional and deep-rooted belief. Thus, we are not so much dealing with a simple riddle for 'hard' science as with fundamental world views. Because the beliefs in these monsters have a collective basis it can function as a legitimate explanation for any unsolved experience on the lakes. Faith in the monster functions as a skeleton structure, giving artificial coherency to an amorphous bulk of sightings.



Inspired by Leopold Plante's sketch [above] **of the conjectural 'sea-iguana' he claims to have seen in Lake Pohénégamook, the illustrator of the cover of the French-Canadian magazine *Allo Police* for 15 May 1977** [below] **has transformed the monster into a dinosaur-like beast with a ridged back and a long neck worthy of a plesiosaur. The 'sea-cow' of oral folklore becomes the relic dinosaur beloved by modern mass-culture.** [Fortean Picture Library]



The strengthening of this mass of information comes from outside. The more anomalous a claim, the more a claimant is dependent upon a recognised authority which can protect, destroy or enhance status in the community. This social dependency of the witness has heretofore been neglected by sceptics and believers. One can argue that this element figures decisively in the play of common reinforcement. At Pohénégamook, for example, the biologist and sturgeon specialist Vladykov had found witnesses who strengthened his own belief in a giant sturgeon as an explanation. On the other hand, the official status of this envoy from the provincial government had helped the rationalistic interpretation by local adepts to a momentous supremacy. Yet the coming of Vladykov, at Pohénégamook, solved nothing at the level of Nature itself; instead, it furnished material for the *counter-legend* of the alleged "escaped sturgeon".

DÉGH: ANTI-LEGEND

On the other side of the argument, during the 1970s, monster enthusiasts gathered under the flag of a local priest, Leopold Plante, offering a whole system of beliefs about the monster including its identity as an iguana, the reality of its cavernous lair and of Pohénégamook's unfathomable depths. In this case the religious authority of the priest helped the traditional and anomalistic interpretation to survive Vladykov's rationalising and adapt to the modern age of monster hunts. Vladykov and Plante fixed two opposing forms – the 'Big Fish' and the 'Lizard' (or crocodilian) – providing models for further sightings.

A rival form – the 'sea-cow' – seems to be of older origin at Pohénégamook, as we saw in the previous chapter. Significantly, according to traditional history, this creature appeared to Benoit Levasseur, the "pioneer founder of the parish". This character of the "sea monster" seems to have originated with the colonists of Saint-Éleuthère, at Pohénégamook, who came from Saint-Alexandre, a village near the Saint Lawrence Gulf. Therefore, one can interpret the "beast of the lake" primarily as an importation of sea folklore to an inland lake. Sea-cow, big fish and crocodilian all form specific strata. While this plurality destroys all attempts towards coherency, it is, at the same time, providing an extra-individual patterning for individual experiences.

This field study reveals the dynamism of the traditional lake monster belief and its capacity for evolving and modernising. There are several fascinating examples of this at Pohénégamook. Andrée Casgrain-Blackburn, interviewing the curate Plante [1], made an allusion to a local rumour about a helicopter pilot who climbed down a rope ladder onto the monster's back. The curate was sceptical. In August 1982, I discussed this rumour with Ivanhoe Nadeau, one of the old pioneer folk of Saint-Éleuthère, who agreed with the priest's negative assessment, adding: "Monsieur le curé Plante told me that there was grass and sand on the monster's back and that the *Beast* was like an island which sank suddenly." [2]

The folklorist will easily recognise here two elaborations of the medieval 'beast-island' legend. [3] Even today one can find witnesses attesting to this living island. In 1969, Maja Boškovic-Stulli interviewed a sailor from the Adriatic coast who told her that he had seen "a fish like an island, on his back green grass grows... " [4]

The story of the helicopter pilot descending onto the back of Pohénégamook's Beast is a good example of a legendary motif surviving and adapting to the age of technology.

I have shown, in a recent study [5], that the addition of allusions to modern technology (machinism) to traditional narratives can give them a new plausibility. Jules Verne's Professor Aronnax can, therefore, on the back of the *Nautilus*, experience the adventure old seamen could only dream of. The invention of the 'beast of steel', the submarine, has given consistency to fantasy; legend comes to life and myth poses as conjecture.

At the same time, paleontological discoveries offered a second chance to dragons. In this way science has helped the romantic mind to preserve fabulous beings. *"The bones of those dreams are in our museums,"* asserted Victor Hugo triumphantly in 1864, six years before *Twenty thousand leagues under the sea* was published. Sometimes, though, the technological interpretation is used as an argument for the counter-legend, as a more fashionable explanation than the "escaped fish". At Lake Saint-François, people who accepted the fable of the mysterious submarine were relieved to hear that the monster was *"mechanical"*, thinking: "So it was only a human product after all!" [6]

ANTI-LEGEND

The submarine interpretation is a more radical rationalisation than the 'Big Fish' because it puts the problem on a more common, even familiar, level. People even whisper the name of this Québecian Captain Nemo. I know him and we have laughed together about this final reductivism: the drowning of a local epic in the wake of a bootlegger's submarine.

J. Leopold Plante, the retired priest who claimed to have seen the monster of Lake Pohénégamook in 1956. [© Adrian Lunny / *Montreal Star*.]

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1 ■ A. Casgrain-Blackburn's inquiry, University of Québec, Laval.

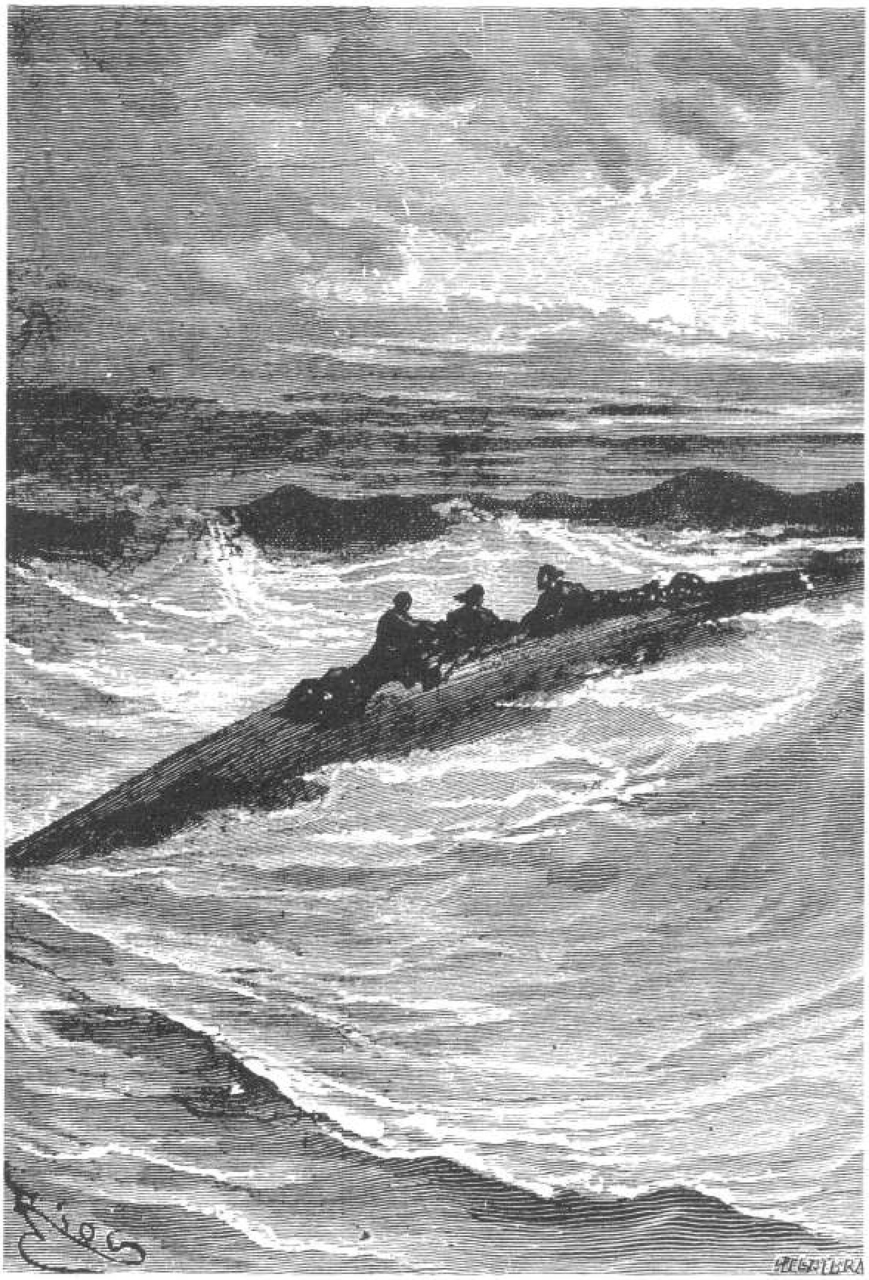
2 ■ Unpublished interview with I. Nadeau.

3 ■ See Rudolf Schenda, 'Walfisch-lore und Walfisch-literatur,' in *Laographia*, 22, IV International Congress for Folk-Narrative Research in Athens, Athens, 1965, p434–438.

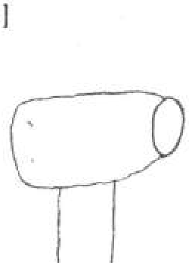
4 ■ Maja Boškovic-Stulli, 'Der Anteil des Meeres bei der Gestaltung der mythischen Sagen an der kroatischen Adria-Küste,' in L. Röhrich (ed), *Probleme der Sagenforschung*, 1973, p89–90.

5 ■ Michel Meurger, 'Zur Diskussion des Begriffs 'modern legend' am Beispiel der 'Airships' von 1896–1897,' in *Fabula: Zeitschrift für Erzählforschung*, Berlin & New York, vol 26, N° 3/4 (1985), p254–273.

6 ■ See Chapter 1, p76.



On the back of the submarine – a mechanical version of the beast-island of legend. Neuville's illustration for Jules Verne's *20,000 leagues under the sea* **(1869).** [Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library]



Toussaint Dostie'a sketch of the 'periscope' he allegedly saw on Lake Saint-François. [Michel Meurger]

But even modernised, the anomalous form continues to appear in traditional locations. According to Toussaint Dostie, his sighting of a "periscope" took place at the precise spot haunted by the monster, where the supposed whirlpool draws swimmers into the "underground river" connecting Lake Saint-François with Lake Aylmer. [**7**] This mysterious sub is described as realistically as the monster, and if scales are the mark of the dragon, metal is the sign of modernity. In June 1982, I asked Toussaint for details about the "periscope". He answered that it was not some long neck of an animal but a manmade thing, "round and metallic, with a piece of glass at the centre, that was mounted on a pole," [see illustration, left]. [**8**]

When I discussed sightings near the 'Iron Bridge' with Renaud Bilodeau, a carpenter from Lambton, he disclosed the following tradition:

"There was a beastie on the Iron Bridge, as big as a car. She lived on earth and underwater. She was obstructing the bridge and nobody could pass over it. So the people of that place called

7 ■ See Chapter 1, p58.

8 ■ Unpublished interview with Toussaint Dostie, at Lambton.

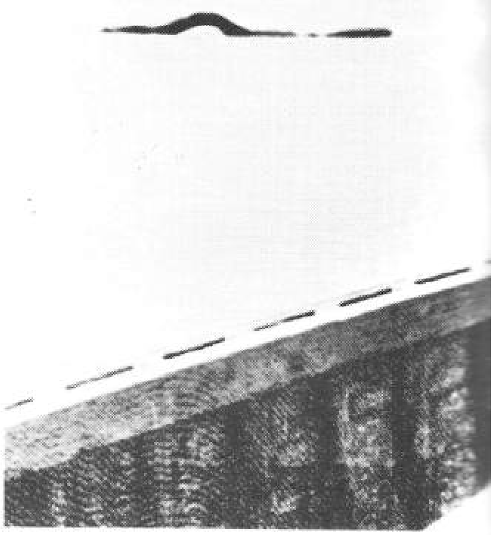
THE MONSTER HUNT MEMORIALIZES LOCAL HISTORY — GUTOWSKI: 'PROTOFESTIVAL'

for the curé of Saint-Romain. He was an exorcist and he exorcised the beastie; thereafter people were able to use the bridge. My father told me that as the plain truth... In the past *curés* could do anything... Today, some say that a reflection of the sun can attract the beastie under the Iron Bridge." [9]

Between the "beastie" of old, the supernatural prey of exorcists, and the bootlegging sub of today there is a long and deep intellectual evolution. Between the catholic world view and the mechanistic one there is also a place for the beast of the local fishermen, the 'Big Fish', which they hope to catch in iron nets, stuff, and display in their living rooms.

Each stage reflects distinct moments of local history: the origins of the community; the obsessive question of social communication; the saga of bootleggers and the present problem of fish scarcity. The devil's beast, the sub and the fish-monster are emblems of those various sequences.

Continuity and discontinuity are dialectically united and solved by the *social symbolism* of the riddle of the lakes. Whether a critter of flesh and blood or a technological marvel, the "thing" of Lake Saint-François has a relatively stable function in the Imaginary World created by the surrounding communities. It symbolizes the natural and social unknown, the outlawed and the unhuman. One can extend this analysis to other Québecian lakes. Even Pohénégamook references to the misadventures of the Amerindians with the creature, spurious as they may be, have at this level a symbolic meaning.



An alleged photograph of 'Manipogo', the monster of Lake Manitoba, said to have been taken on 12 August 1962 by two fishermen. The dark log-like characteristics are prominent. [Courtesy of Fortean Picture Library]

In a traditional North American interpretation, the Indians belong to Nature, and in this sense the beast of local origins is also the beast of the Indians. Hence the image of the *priest* is central to the Québecian lake monster concept. The priest - a Jesuit or curate - stands as the adversary of all the powers of the wilderness. He converts Indians and fights their pagan deities (such as the Great Serpent of Lorette). [10] Due to his specific place in traditional Québecian society, the local curate was the spiritual leader of the colonists, fighting against Nature to maintain an endangered culture. Therefore the local priest is considered to be a privileged interlocutor with the water monster. Water was also the royal road of colonisation, the only way of communication for centuries. Thus, we can interpret the fight between the curates of Québec and the lake monsters as the battle of the whole community against a personification of the wilderness. In this fight there were defeats and victories. According to this traditional interpretation, the priests who drowned had been swallowed by the beast; in fact the death of the curate Gignac in Lake Aylmer is still interpreted this way today, and at Lake Saint-François, as we have seen, the curate Bernard was nearly pulled into its depths. [11]

Stories about lake monsters are thus part of a popular *Legenda Aurea*, in which clerical witnesses of water monsters become endowed with magical powers. Father Calixte Bérubé [12] was considered by the old people of Estcourt "as a very special being. Some said he had changed the direction of the wind, compelling a forest fire to move towards the lake, and thus saving Estcourt village. He had the power of the old priests to stop fire; he knew family genealogies and medicinal herbs." [13]

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9 ■ Unpublished interview with Renaud Bilodeau, at Lambton.

At Lake Tanganyika, a "red reflection on the lake" signifies to the fishermen that the fearful *Pamba* is busy looking for canoes to swallow, and "natives are restrained from going out." W.L. Speight, 'Mystery monsters in Africa', in *Empire Review*, vol 71, 1940, p225f.

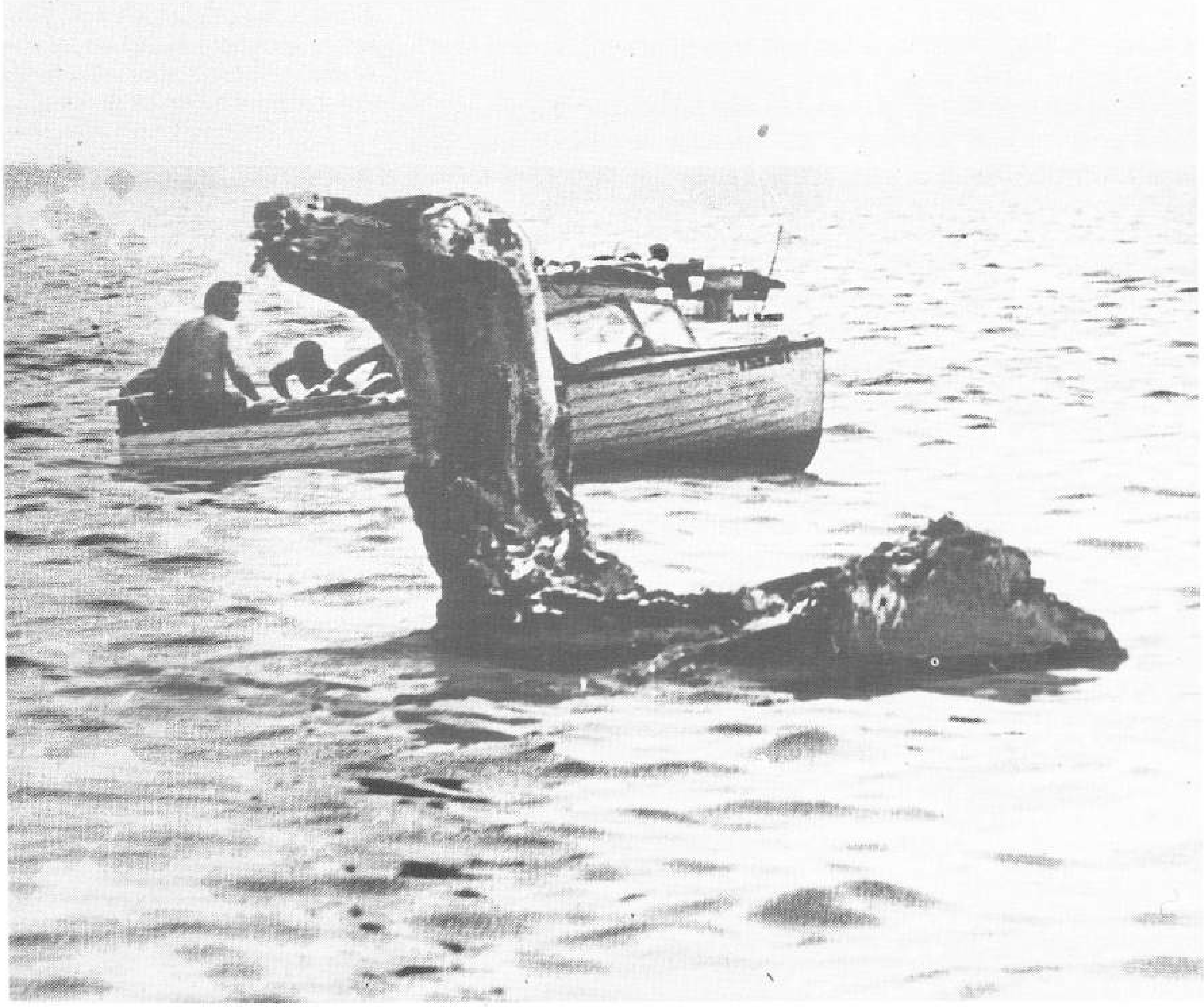
10 ■ See Chapter 4, Section 6.

11 ■ According to some inhabitants of Disraeli. Unpublished interview with Carole Mercier and Mario Lavoie.

The alleged sighting of the 'horse's head' of Blue-Sea Lake, by people leaving church on a Sunday, can also be interpreted as a confrontation between the Christian congregation and its demonic adversary in its favourite snaky form. See also Chapter 1, Note 2, p107.

12 ■ See Chapter 1, p43ff.

13 ■ Unpublished interview with France Théberge, at Estcourt.



A magnificent simulacrum - a Nessie-shaped tree-trunk photographed drifting on Lake Ontario in 1954. [© Associated Press.]

Therefore, the witness of the monster, especially if he is a spiritual authority (like Father Bérubé, or curate Plante and his 'Beast-Island') is more easily woven into a legendary cloth.

This association between the lake monster and tradition is especially strong with Elzéar Sirois, the Ponik witness, lumberjack, and storyteller, whose father was a "bone-setter" (*ramancheur*). [**14**] As an old logger, Sirois' concept of the Beast is traditional: he first heard of it by oral transmission in the logging camps. For him the first to see the Pohénégamook mystery was *one of the first settlers,* the "giant" logger and pioneer Louis Bérubé. [**15**] Thus, as people told me: "Ponik is Pohénégamook," or, according to Jeannot Bouchard: "the Beast is a parochial phenomenon." [**16**] The Pohénégamook Beast *personifies the unofficial local history.*

GUTOWSKI:
'PROTOFESTIVAL'

Today, Ponik has shifted from being a fabulous critter to being an allegory of a certain way of life, satisfying the deep longing of modern Québecois for the 'good old days' characterized by the boisterous life of the lumberjacks. It is no coincidence that one of the favourite haunts of the Lake Aylmer monster is a tiny islet called *"l'Île des draveurs"* [Loggers' Island], where, around 1914, lumberjacks sited their log cabins. According to local investigators Carole Mercier and Mario Lavoie: "Around this island, logs abound underwater as relics of the

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14 ■ See: 'Ramancheur', in L. Bergeron, 1980, p105.

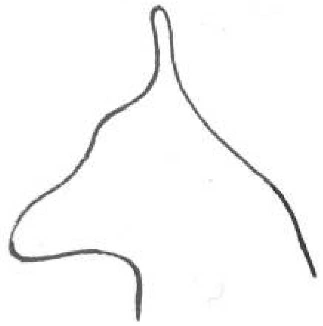
15 ■ See Chapter 1, p46.

16 ■ Unpublished interview with Mrs Bouchard.

running of timber. At spring these logs usually come to the surface." Carole and Mario have seen and photographed some of these bizarre trunks. [17]

Sceptic Maurice Burton would find here material to support his theory of lake monsters as mats of vegetation and gas produced by rotting wood. [18] Yet the same chemical processes may occur in dozens of lakes once used to run timber, so few of which have developed any strong monster tradition.

Below: **The "unicorn" of Lake Pohénégamook, sketched by Mrs Annonciade Charron.** [Michel Meurger]



Indeed, a floating log can *represent* a monster, but it does not *create* it. The 'Beastie' originated in the mind. Perhaps, at Lake Aylmer, the association of legendary loggers with some natural phenomena played a part in the production of the local monster.

Loggers – strangers working in woods and on water – were *frontiersmen* living in the borderland between Culture and Nature. It is understandable that the Lake Aylmer monster should appear near their island, seen also as their *frontier*. In a way, lake monsters play the same role as Paul Bunyan's giant ox; they are giant beasts for giant men, helping the process of heroically mythologising the past extent from Man to Nature. This rhetorical enhancement of local history can, in convenient times and convenient places, produce an ambiguous *revival*.

MONSTER AS BOUNDARY
DELINEATION AT LIMINAL
ZONES

MONSTER HUNT
AS "RE-ENACTMENT"
— RE-ENACTMENT OF
LAND WARS IN WAIKATO
SAURIAN HUNT

Logger Elzéar Sirois, as a chronicler of Ponik, had the privilege to transmit his traditional knowledge at the precise location in which the Québecian nostalgia for the outdoor life is institutionalised: at a Pohénégamook "fresh air" holiday camp, with its associated campfires *à la* Fenimore Cooper, backpacking and water sports. Elzéar, who worked there as a foreman, said: "I worked at the *base de plein air* in 1972, and the whole affair started two years after. I led groups of children to the lake. I told them about the lumber-time; we climbed on logs and, sliding smoothly through the water, I told them the stories of the seven-foot tall Louis Bérubé and of the Beast... The kids were enthralled; they asked questions. One of their teachers was equally thrilled. Then came the TV men..." [19]

This beautiful Pohénégamook lake, so inconvenient for a natural monster – because it had now become a favourite tourist spot – is the perfect setting for cultural transmission. Bored city men and their families, disillusioned by the "disenchantment of the world" (Max Weber) were re-enchanted by Sirois, a traditional magician.

All the rhetorical aspects of Sirois' poetical evocation of giants and monsters were lost to press-men and amateurs. The story of the lake Beast, and the saga of human communities, became a naturalistic chronicle. Modern mass-culture had translated Sirois' folk-culture into objective stories. No longer were the giant lumbermen seen as *actors* in a symbolic Nature drama; they were now reduced to the status of simple *witnesses* to a natural phenomenon. Furthermore, the readjustment by the press of the Loch Ness model offered to witnesses a more fashionable patterning. Traditional 'sea-cow' monster forms vanish from the recent testimonies at Pohénégamook, and in their place Nessie-like long-necks appear.

"NO LONGER [...] *ACTORS* IN A
SYMBOLIC NATURE DRAMA; THEY
WERE NOW REDUCED TO THE
STATUS OF SIMPLE *WITNESSES* [.]"

✓

In order to find traditional representations one has to look

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17 ■ Unpublished interview with Carole Mercier and Mario Lavoie.

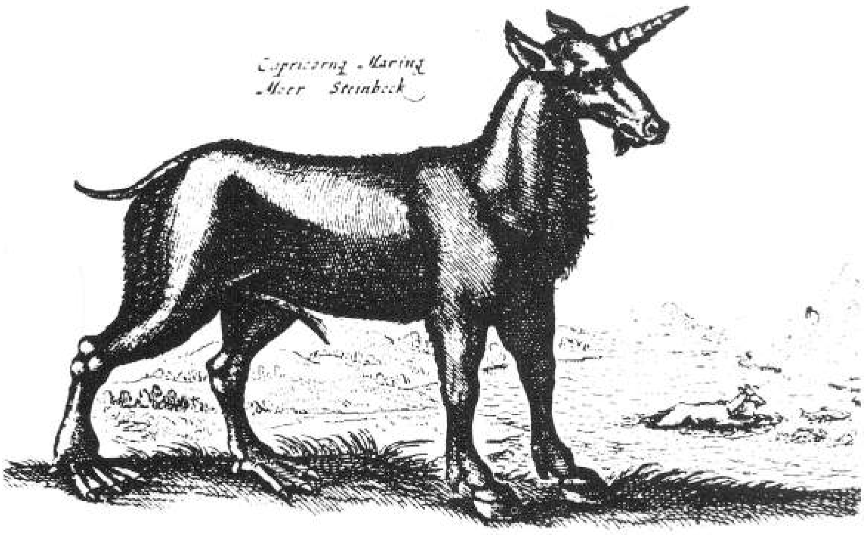
18 ■ M. Burton, 1961, pp91–102.

19 ■ Unpublished interview with Elzéar Sirois.

back towards the older sightings like the one reported by Mrs Annonciade Charron in the 1950s: "I was with my sister. We were gazing at a magnificent sunset at Pohénégamook. All of a sudden she cried out: 'See! Is it a dream?' It was a *horse's head* on a short neck emerging from the water. There was a horn on its head; a pointed horn, shining white. I told my sister: 'It's ivory!' It was *the head of a unicorn*." [See drawing, left] [20]

Other witnesses at Pohénégamook speak of monsters with two or three horns, but this sighting is unique. It has an æsthetic beauty and the perfection of a vision. This ivory horn, pointing to the red sky, reminds us of the unicorn lake monsters of Gaelic folklore. This image has reached North America as the spiritual inheritance of Scottish and Irish colonists. (Elzéar Sirois' mother was Irish.)

The unicorn of Pohénégamook belongs to the same fauna as the Scandinavian *lindorm* and the Faroe mermaid. A creature of legend, it can also be analysed as *a cultural relic* because it does not fit into the present naturalistic interpretation dominant in the lake region. Because of this, we have to study a European example of this older supernatural stratum.

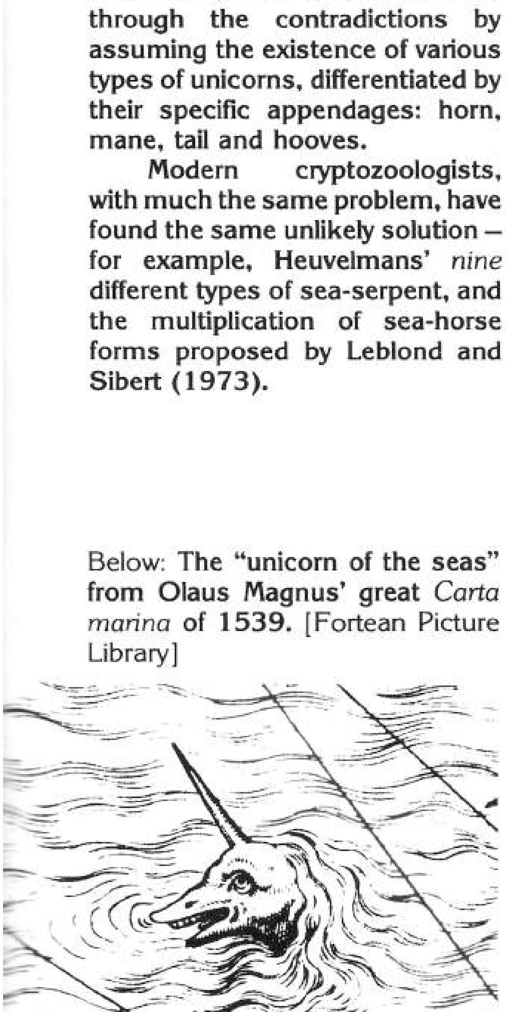


Right: **The aquatic unicorn or "sea-ibex", with webbed hind feet, which is shown in the background chasing fishes in a river, according to the *Historia naturalis* (1657) of J. Jonston, who also illustrates other varieties of the beast.** [Fortean Picture Library]

As a consequence of the transformation of the symbolic medieval unicorn into a would-be *animal*, it became impossible to reconcile the conflicting travellers' tales into a definitive representation. The 17th century naturalists, therefore, had to cut through the contradictions by assuming the existence of various types of unicorns, differentiated by their specific appendages: horn, mane, tail and hooves.

Modern cryptozoologists, with much the same problem, have found the same unlikely solution – for example, Heuvelmans' *nine* different types of sea-serpent, and the multiplication of sea-horse forms proposed by Leblond and Sibert (1973).

Below: **The "unicorn of the seas" from Olaus Magnus' great *Carta marina* of 1539.** [Fortean Picture Library]



THE BIG ELBST: FROM GHOST TO FISHING TROPHY

The oldest European lake around which legends of monsters are spun is a tranquil Swiss lake, hidden among the valleys of Canton Uri. This tiny lake – the Selisbergsee – has an impressive series of testimonies spanning five centuries, from 1584 to 1926, just before the discovery of Nessie by the world's press. Sightings at the Selisbergsee, during the Reformation, are far more informative than the sparse reports about the Scottish lake monsters.

The reader should be warned, however, against using this material to strengthen the case of lake monsters as being 'hidden' animals. The shore-dwellers' concept of their monster is a *supernatural* one. For them the Selisbergsee was the place of multiple *hauntings*, including animal forms. The inexhaustible clerk of Lucerne, Renward Cysat, is the first to have mentioned the aquatic phantoms of this Swiss lake:

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[20] Unpublished interview with Mrs Annonciade Charron.

"There is a mountain lake, above the town of Lucerne, on the right, two hours from Uri. People have seen, on several occasions, and very recently, in 1585, on this lake, in fair weather, two *ghosts* of different shapes, swimming here and there. They metamorphosed themselves, one into a *great log*, the other into a *haystack*. As the witnesses approached, the two objects disappeared. The inhabitants of the country took them to be *portents of catastrophes*." [21]

For local people the sighted forms were *prodigies*, in the same sense as the various marvels of the Norwegian Lake Mjösa were understood to be according to the *Hamar Chronicle*. Cysat's nephew, Leopold, completed Renward's account in 1611. In his interesting report, he recounts an excursion he had made to these haunted waters. There seems to have been a public disturbance and the inhabitants of the area told him that, on the same evening "of the most remarkable things."

"For several years, rare and marvellous things have shown themselves, namely, often, through clear water, people have seen *a herd of pigs* on the bottom, which, in the wink of an eye, transformed themselves and turned inside out like calf hides which had just been skinned." [22]

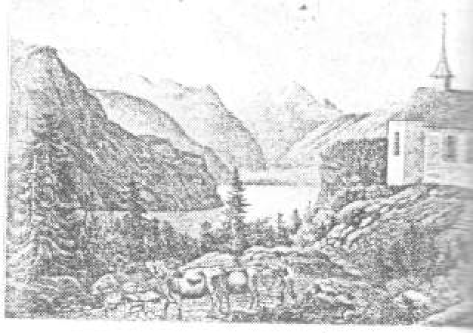
Leopold Cysat added that people did not know the location of the outlet of the Selisbergsee, but that it was supposed to be in "secret communication" with the lake of Lucerne.

The forms described by Renward and Leopold Cysat have nothing to do with the morphology of an unknown animal. They are, instead, comparable with the amorphous masses one encounters in historical ghost literature. [23] Even the pig herd dissolves into inanimate *"things"*. At this stage, the phenomena were not identified as an individual monster. For this we have to wait for the work of the folklorist Kohlrusch, published in 1854, in which he states:

"In the depths of the Selisberg lake lives a *monster* whom the inhabitants call 'the Elbst'. He has a *serpent shape*, a body armoured with scales and clawed feet like a dragon. But he rarely shows himself in his *true form*: sometimes he swims like a *tree trunk* covered with moss, sometimes as a narrow *floating island* which detaches itself from the bank, sometimes as a *green bough* on the surface. Misfortune to him who tries to approach these deceitful seductive images! The claws of the Beast will drag him to the bottom; but the Elbst threatens also the property of the shepherds. Often at night he bounds onto the shore and reaches the mountain pastures, taking his horrible forms. In the morning one finds carcasses of cattle dispersed all around the lake, the slaughtered cows bearing on their flanks the marks of sharp talons: evidences, for the herdsmen, of the lugubrious visit." [24]

This passage is important, not just for its rich contents, but also because Kohlrusch speaks of *a* "monster", a serpent with feet, as the primary and true shape of the *Elbst*. The image of the serpent with four feet seems to be traditional in Switzerland; remember the "great serpent with feet" from the Aar river, in 1480, conceived, like the *Elbst*, as an amphibious creature; and also the killings of cows in 1566, allegedly committed by the

Chapel of Our Lady of Sonnenberg and the Selisberg Lake (Canton Uri); mid 19th century engraving by Salathé. [Berne National Library]



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21 ■ R. Cysat, 1969, vol 4.

22 ■ L. Cysat, 1611.

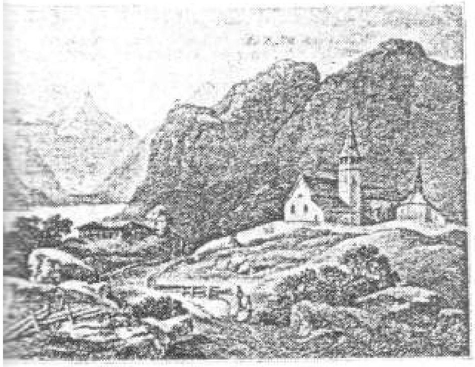
23 ■ See, for example, the "black cloud" at Ringcroft in 1695; in H. Price, 1945, p79.

The Slavs know a fascinating proteus. According to a Posnanian legend, an old shepherd spending the night near a deep stream at Sierniki, saw, by the light of the moon, a shape passing over the water. The man, full of bravura, threw a stone at it. At that instant the thing rose to its full height and fell back into the water with a terrible splash. The shepherd could distinguish a heavy body, with a goat-like head, perched upon long forepaws which started to crawl up the hill to menace him. When the monster was hit by a second stone its head detached itself to transform into a serpent which hissed at the shepherd. The body, meanwhile, melted into the ground and diffused a reddish light. The shepherd didn't wait for more and took to his heels, pursued by the frightful redness. O. Knoop, 1913.

24 ■ C. Kohlrusch, 1854.

"serpent of the Reuss". [25]

One can imagine a gradual process of cultural sedimentation, accumulating in the local folklore various legendary representations, and among them the serpent with feet. When Kohlrusch collected his material the animal aspect had prevailed over the phantom forms. By 1854 the "tree trunk" of 1585 is only a simulacrum. The *Elbst* is not yet flesh and blood because it can change into inanimate things.



The hamlet of Selisberg, in the Swiss canton of Uri, with the lake in the background; mid-19th century engraving by Salathé. [Berne National Library]

But the importance of the monster aspect shows a *growing process of naturalization*. Kohlrusch – publishing five years before Darwin's *The origin of species* (1859) – bears testimony to the evolution of the legendary world. The folkloristic picture of the *Elbst* nevertheless keeps the attributes of traditional water spirits. The trick of using seductive objects to lure humans has been recorded since the 12th century, when Gervase of Tilbury described the *dracs* of the Rhône. Sometimes in the form of *gold rings*, they would float along the river, dragging down women and children who had come too close. [26]

In the case of the *Elbst* the baits are apparently harmless *fragments of the Selisberg environment*: thus, at this level of belief, the *Elbst* was himself part of the *mythical landscape*, with an emphasis on the *vegetable* kingdom (trunk and bough).

Ironically, the system of legends includes both the interpretations of lake monsters favoured by sceptics and by cryptozoologists: the monster as a tree trunk or floating island, or as an unknown serpent-like animal. [27] However, the folk perspective of 1854 includes all these aspects in one mythical *unity* under the generic name of *"Elbst"*. By comparison, the fundamental reductivism of the sceptic's and cryptozoologist's explanation would *select* either the floating island or the unknown creature.

TANIWHA ALSO TAKE FORMS OF 'ENCHANTED LOGS' OR TIPUA AND SERPENTS IN AN ASSEMBLAGE OR CONSTELLATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL MOTIFS YET IRREDUCIBLE TO ANY ONE

One can also speak of two opposing concepts about the environment – one *magical traditional*, the other *natural experimental* – and the concept of the *Elbst* was evolving from the former domain into a completely natural creature. In an inquiry of 1863 – one year before Kohlrusch – a "trustful man" stated that he had seen the "Big Fish", "which had not shown itself for seven years". He described the monster as "a sort of red sow". [28] The *Elbst* had been rationalised into a "fish", and one can record experiences of him on the judicial level. The bizarre and protean herd of sows from 1611 has become a sow-like unknown creature.

Yet we have not exhausted all the traditional sources. Works by T. Vernaleken (1858), Alois Lutolf (1862), and Otto Henne–Am–Rhyn (1874) will help complete our analysis. Josef Müller's huge legendary corpus from Uri, published in 1926, contains the first attempt at a systematic interview with folklore informants, judging themselves to be witnesses. Five sighters are named whose experiences fell between 1914 and 1927.

In local legends the *Elbst* is referred to as a *"Gespenst"* (ghost). [29] According to one version he was originally a *"ghostly white horse"* haunting a mountain pasture. A Capuchin friar had *exorcised* him and, as a "long fiery ray", sent him down from the top of the mountain into confinement in the waters of the Selisberg lake. [30]

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[25] ■ See Chapter 2, p149.

[26] ■ G.Benwell and A. Waugh, 1961, p174.

[27] ■ In this context it is interesting to consider a suggestive description of the phenomena of Loch Tay on a 14th century Scottish map: *"In isto lacu tria mirabilia; insula natans; pices sine intestines; fretum sine vento."* ("In this loch are three wonders: a moving island, fish without fins, waves without wind.") Cited by P. Costello, 1974, p141.

Almost exactly the same description, but attached to Loch Lomond, appears on Blaeu's *Atlas*, drawn in 1653. Costello, op.cit. p142.

[28] ■ J. Müller, vol 1, 1926.

[29] ■ *ibidem*.

[30] ■ *ibidem*.

Thus, like the demonic beastie of Lake Saint–François, the *Elbst* had become a "monster", or a more rational giant "fish". The huge sampling of representations from around Swiss and Québecian lakes shows various and successive cultural deposits, aggregated by local belief. In 1918, Karl Zwyssig asserted that his father had seen "the ghost" (*Elbst*) as a "Capuchin friar, fish, *sow*, and *haystack*, but never as *a sheep or dove*." [31] From being the antagonist of the *Elbst*, the Capuchin had become the *Elbst* himself!

The "haystack" form has a longer tradition because it was cited by Renward Cysat in relating a sighting of 1585. Over 300 years separate the two documents. Here is proof of the historical continuity of a legendary motif, which allows us to correct Grimshaw and Lester, who use as a basis for their cultural study of the Loch Ness monster "the historical discontinuity of cultures." [32]

Traditional cultures *do* have a *relative* continuity. The term 'relative' is emphasised because, contrary to Jungian fantasies, *formal* continuity does not mean the continuity of *contents*. The *pig*–image of the *Elbst* is attestable from the 17th century on; yet, as we have noted, the "pig herd" of 1611 was conceived as a ghostly phenomenon, whereas the "red sow" of 1863 is clearly seen as a living animal.

ANTI-JUNG

LANGUAGE CHANGES MUCH MORE SLOWLY THAN MEANING ACCORDING TO HISTORIANS OF LINGUISTICS. THE SAME FORMS ARE RETAINED FOR A LONG TIME EVEN TO CONVEY TOTALLY DIFFERENT CONTENTS

The *Elbst* story is the chronicle of an *evolution*, of a progressive change from symbolism to naturalism. As recently as 1918, Karl Zwyssig could believe in a shape–shifting *Elbst*, a supernatural demon which had no power to disguise itself as a sheep or dove; the dove being a symbol for the Holy Ghost, and a sheep for the *Agnus Dei*. But also around this time, the struggle between the two world views, the supernatural and the rationalistic, was still going on at the Selisbergsee. A shoemaker noticed that the "Great Fish" showed itself "every time it had rained and when, in the evening, the good weather returned." Another witness, Maria Ziegler, who was 60 years old when interviewed in 1914, remembered that in her youth, "each time that a storm approached, something large and black came almost to the surface." A neighbour who also witnessed the phenomenon took it for a "large school of fish". [33]

This ideological struggle is comparable to the opposition between believers and sceptics. At the lake of Root, according to Leopold Cysat, sceptics experimentally discovered that the "monster" was a school of fish without convincing the local ferryman. Between the publication of Leopold Cysat's book in 1611, and the *Elbst* witnesses of 1914, each camp stuck to its position. That the situation has not yet changed, is illustrated by the Loch Ness story.

However, at the close of the 19th century, the 'Big Fish' hypothesis increased the numbers of its supporters. Local fishermen then saw the *Elbst* as a pest, its appetite fed by such a quantity of fishes that the little lake was almost depleted. Peasants even had the idea of creating *an association for the capture of the Elbst*, although others energetically refused to be part of it. [34] So the ghost or nature spirit turned into a catchable unknown monster that could be mounted as a 'trophy'!

The "progressionists" were interpreting fish scarcity along

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31 ■ J. Müller, vol 1, 1926.

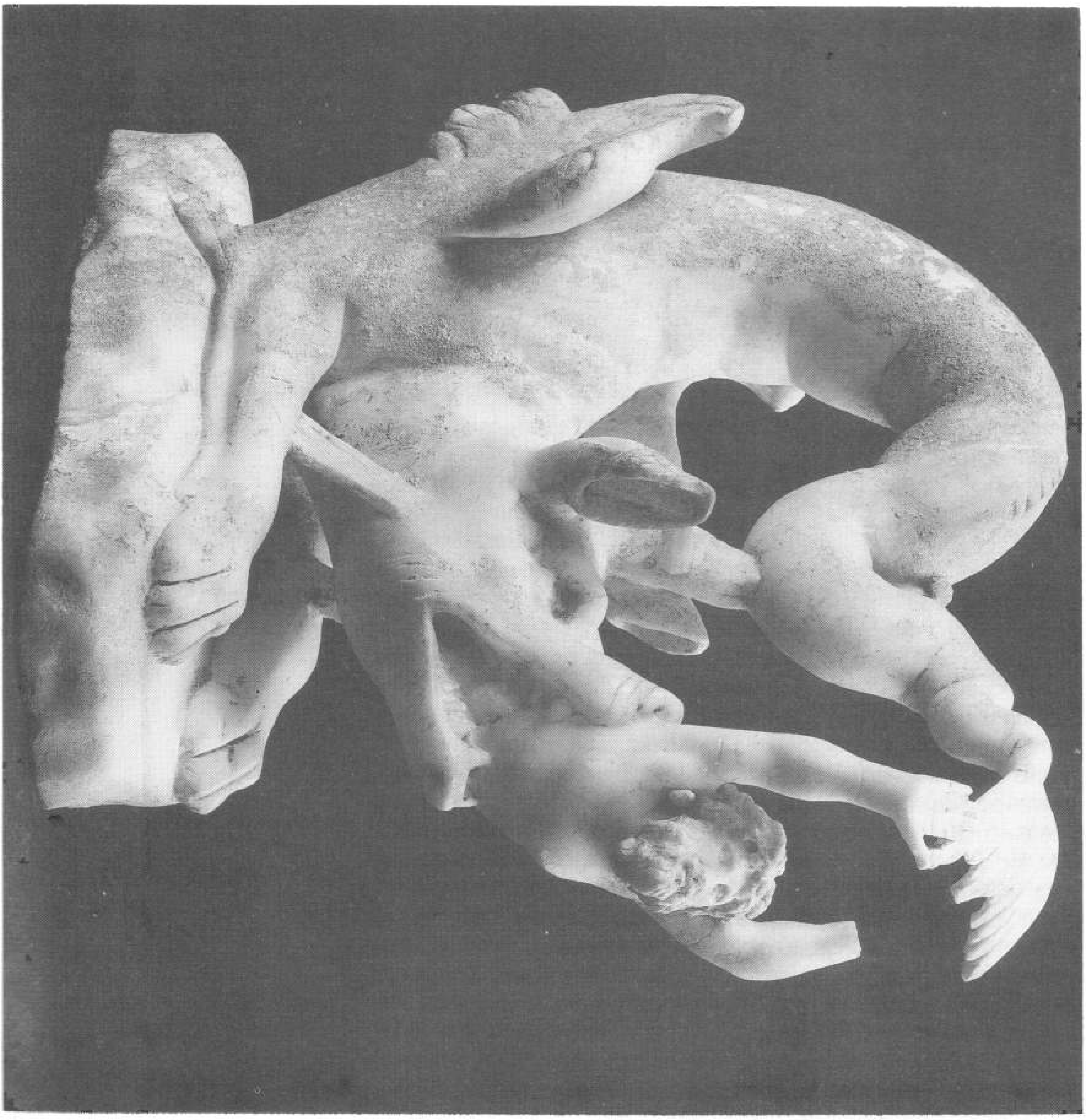
32 ■ R. Grimshaw and P. Lester, 1976.

33 ■ J. Müller, vol 1, 1926.

34 ■ *ibidem*.

35 ■ *ibidem*.

36 ■ See Chapter 2, Section 6.



Phorcys, was a boar-headed sea-god, who sired many of the more monstrous gods of the Greeks. Also called Porcus or Orcus in Latin (from which the word 'ogre' is derived) he represented death in the fearful ocean depths.

This 3rd century marble from the Eastern Mediterranen, is catalogued as 'Jonah cast up by the whale', but might equally represent the doom of unlucky sailors in the jaws of Phorcys. The use of swine-like features in the hybrid monsters of the Renaissance has been highlighted in this book.

[© Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio (John L. Severance Fund).]

the same lines as Louis-Philippe Roy at Lake Saint–François; whereas the "traditionalists" stoutly maintained their view of a demonic *Elbst*, master of metamorphosis. In 1921, Maria Zwyssig described him as an "evil spirit banned in the lake", showing himself sometimes as a *"haystack"*, sometimes as a "red ninepin" and *sometimes as a fish*. She was afraid that "if one killed this fish, *the lake would overflow, drowning the entire countryside.*" **[35]** One year before the birth of Surrealism, this old lady in a remote part of the Alps believed in the age-old world-view of the "Beast of the Last Days". **[36]**

Yet this concept of a sacred fish tied to the destiny of the local community was in the minority by 1921. The agent of a local *Götterdämmerung* was losing ground to the benefit of an unknown creature, a new belief strengthened by sightings equally realistic as the ones of the 16th and 17th centuries, but this time describing an *animal* instead of a *ghost*. One witness, in 1917, presents the *Elbst* as a "fish as large as a boat, even two boats floating side by side on the water," while the brother of the same witness recalled that the monster's head was "the *size* of a big *sow.*" The *Elbst* is no longer a ghostly pig or a kind of water–sow, its head was henceforth only the *size* of a sow's head. Mythic dimensions dwindle into metrical accuracy.

During the summer of 1926, in clear weather, workers (both locals and foreigners) and their foreman building a new road to the hamlet allegedly had the last recorded sighting of the *Elbst*: "A dark mass, two and a half metres long appeared suddenly at the surface of the water and swam rapidly across the widest part of the lake to plunge abruptly," producing "waves like a steamboat, " they said. All of them testified "having seen the same thing, and the foreman declared at the local inn, that he was *ready to sign an official report*. The entire mountain was in an uproar and many *foretold misfortune.* One local noted "there was something in the Seeli"; another affirmed that there were fish "which only came up to the surface every 20 years, but otherwise stayed at the bottom." [**37**] The name "the Great *Elbst"* was still in use at this time; the last testimony to this was provided by a Mr Truttman in 1927, just six years before Loch Ness rose to international fame.

The modern press has failed to give the *Elbst* a place in our mass culture. The riddle of the Selisberg lake came to a close just as the Loch Ness story was about to begin, also due to the construction of a new road. [**38**] Missing from the shore of the Swiss lake was an Alex Campbell, the water bailiff and local correspondent for a Scottish newspaper [**39**] who acted as a mediator between country belief and modern sensationalism. Yet the *Elbst* story is very instructive, and can be studied as a microcosm and model of the lake monster problem.

From 1585 to 1927 one can follow the change *from the subjective to the allegedly objective*, from the superstitious approach to the *testimonial–judicial* one. This process is also one of reductivism: from the complexity of primeval shapes to the simplicity of modern forms. The integration of natural phenomena, such as the "steamboat-like wave", is a common process which can also be observed at the Scottish lochs and at Québec's Lake Aylmer. If we analyse the various forms of the *Elbst*, we will also find the complementary symbols of *extension* (log) and *retraction* (circle), and the relationship with fire and light, that we discussed in our introduction.

The first notice of the *Elbst* mentions these two movements, extension represented by the great log and contraction by the "haystack". In other sources the creature appears as a "serpent body that *encircles* the lake like a coloured ring," recalling the "multicoloured" Mjösa serpent. In Switzerland, the "mane" of the Nordic monster is replaced by a "gold *crown*". [**40**] Even luminous phenomena are organised by the laws of this precise geometry: extension (the "long fiery ray"), and contraction... A legend describes the original *Elbst* as a *"burning haystack"*, evicted from his mountain lair by an exorcist and tumbling down the slope to the lake bottom as a *"ball of fire"*. [**41**]

Lastly, the *Elbst* is also conveyed by the image of a "flaming wheel" surging from the water to crush passers-by. [**42**] These

[37] ■ J. Müller, vol 1, 1926.

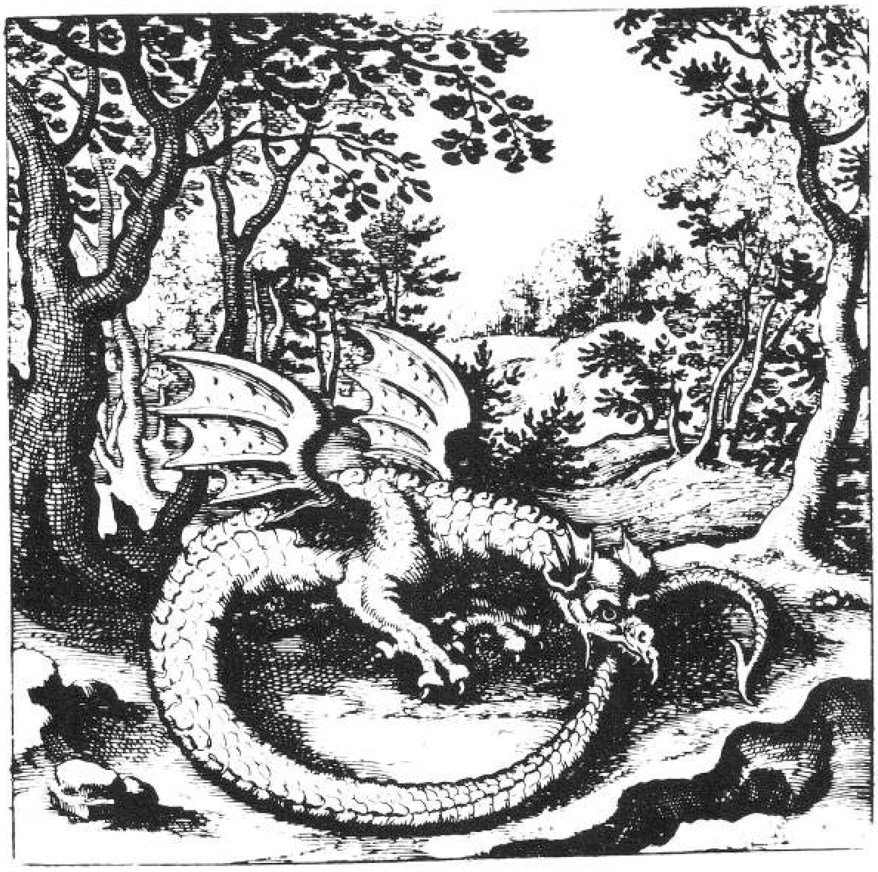
[38] ■ N. Witchell, 1974, chapter 3.

[39] ■ *ibidem*, p39.

[40] ■ O. Henne-am-Rhyn, 1874.
Lake Mjösa monster: see Introduction, p23f..
For other references to the encircling *Elbst* and its "crown", see A. Lütolf, 1862; and T. Vernaleken, 1858.

[41] ■ J. Müller, vol 1, 1926.

[42] ■ *ibidem*.



A dragon-serpent forming an Ouroboros, encircling itself in a forest – an alchemical illustration from Lambspringk, *De lapide philosophico* **(1599).** [Fortean Picture Library]

diverse representations of the *Elbst* coincide with *traditional* forms of spirits, ghosts or water–beings. In Canton Uri the *pig* is known to be a ghostly creature. [**43**] In Norway, the *Nökk* (a water–man) emerges from Lake Rore sometimes as a *horse*, sometimes as a *serpent*, and sometimes as a *haystack*. [**44**] The "phantom of the lake", in Estonia, shows itself as a *canoe*, and at other times as a *horse*, or even as a *sow*. [**45**] Leopold Cysat's strange description of the "calf hides" is to be classified among the numerous representations of ghosts as amorphous things; that is to say vague, roundish masses or "envelopes", like the "sacks" that stumble nightly across travellers, according to the legends of Uri. [**46**]

"[R]EALITY WAS CONCEIVED ONLY AS THE *JUSTIFICATION* OF BELIEF."

What does the *Elbst* story teach us? It gives us an insight into the traditionally orientated mind in the Selisberg lake region, and shows us that reality was conceived only as the *justification* of belief. Certain natural phenomena – such as the slaughter of cattle or the extinction of fish – received a supernatural or simply anomalous interpretation. The first could be ascribed to *bears*, still at large in the Switzerland of 1854 [**47**]; but for the credulous the slaughter of cows only *confirmed* the old legend about a dangerous demon–beast in the lake.

Kohlrusch's narration about the tree trunk which changed into a serpent with feet reminds us of the Lake Moffat episode of the "log that came to life". [**48**] Here, we are dealing with the same sort of problem we found in the stories about *lindorms*: is it a visionary experience or a retrospective cultural enhancement of a banal encounter? *We cannot decide*; but it is important to underline the *unity* of the alleged experiences from Scandinavia, Switzerland and Québec. Thus, in Hyltén-Cavallius' booklet, Sven Magnus Johannsson remembers that, when he

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43 ■ J. Müller, vol 1, 1926.

44 ■ T.Å. Bringsvaerd, 1979.

45 ■ O. Loorits, 1951.

46 ■ J. Müller, vol 1, 1926, N^{os} 433, 435. See also the Swiss monster, *Butasch cun Ilgs*,, likened to a "cow's stomach", discussed in Chapter 2, p138 – and the Chilean *Cuero* or "Hide" in Appendix 6.

47 ■ For example: a bear was killed in Canton Tessin in 1852; see H. Hediger, 1952, p116.

48 ■ See Chapter 1, p84.

was a child, he went to Lake Södre:

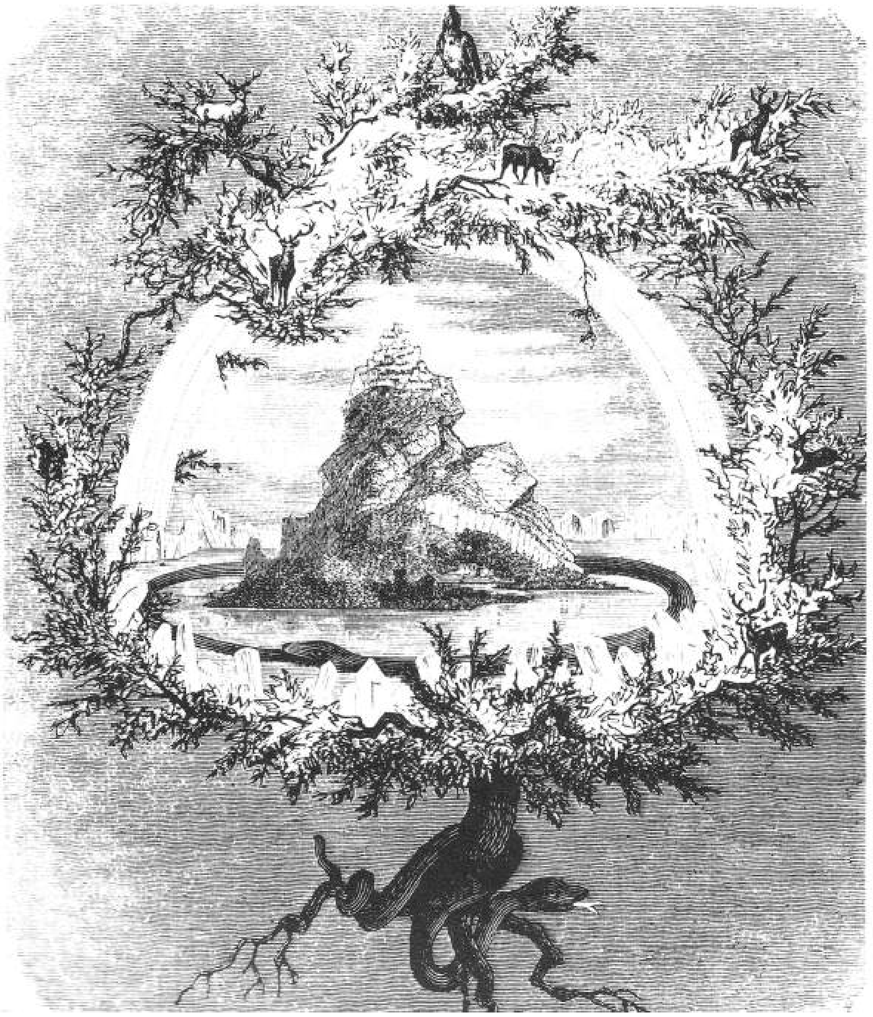
"I saw a long tree trunk... one of its ends vanished into a bush, while the other plunged into the lake. Thinking it was just a log, I *quickly jumped over it*. Judging then that the thing had a weird look, after a few steps I turned around to investigate. I discovered then that it was not a stump but a living animal, a giant snake of the species we call a 'drake' (or *lindorm*)." [**49**]

Another witness told the Swedish folklorist that, while sailing across the great Lake Åsnen, she found a black thing that extended over a rocky islet. It was a huge snake with an eel-like crest, and the body of the monster was *"spread along the whole island"*. [**50**]

The temptation is strong to identify these episodes as repetitive visionary experiences. The extension–contraction motif could suggest some anomalous interpretation of a *mirage*, but we have no way of being certain. Of capital importance, however, is the cultural *sense* of these images: the *lindorm* encircling the lake islet is a miniature of the old Nordic conception of the "World Serpent" entwining the terrestrial world in its folds. The *Elbst* encircling the Selisbergsee, and the Swedish dragon spread across the island unite into a symbolic imagery; vision as revelation, perception as participation in a mythical world.

VIRILIO:
THE TRANSFORMATION
OF VISION FROM REVELATION
TO QUANTIFICATION

But today, the naturalising process has replaced these projections of an Enchanted World by dinosaur–influenced interpretations. The Great Serpent encircling the world – the *Ouroboros* – has lost its dragon tail to Professor Challenger's plesiosaur.



The *axis mundi* of Scandinavian mythology – an ash tree named *Yggdrasil* – unites the heavens and the underworld with Midgard, the realm of men, which is encircled by a serpent – the *Midgardsorm*.

A Victorian illustration for *The Eddas*. [Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library]

49 ■ G.O Hyltén-Cavallius, 1885, p54.

50 ■ *ibidem*, p61.

APPENDIXES

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APPENDIX 1

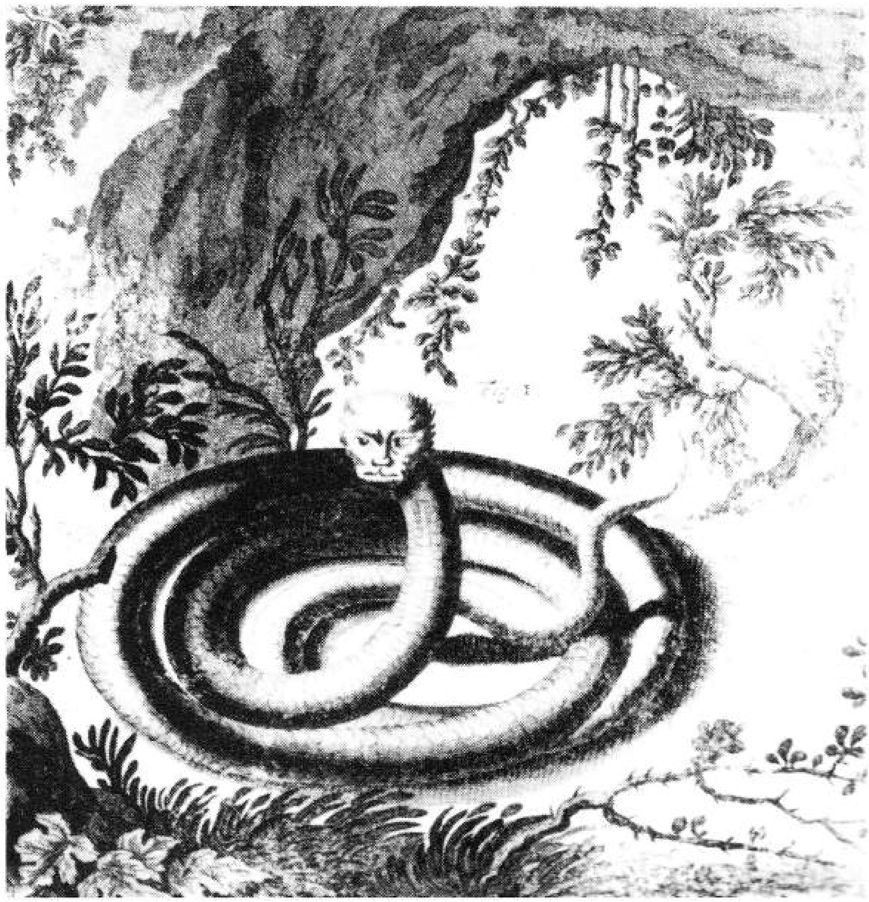
A 'SYSTEMA NATURÆ' OF MONSTROUS SERPENTS

A classification of lizard–like and serpent–like monsters had been realized by the Zurich naturalist Johann Jakob Wagner (1641–1695), and was reproduced, with engravings, by his compatriot, the historian–naturalist Johann Jakob Scheuchzer.

Each of these illustrations seems to designate an animal of a different species. Thus, next to the serpent of the Reuss, figures a lizard with a ridge, a biped serpent with a mane, and another with a cat's head. The anecdotes record encounters with these monsters, described in a realistic fashion. For example, Scheuchzer writes that at the beginning of the 18th century:

"Jean Tinner, a man of probity, worthy of faith, and who is still alive, told me that he was, 12 years ago towards the end of April, on the mountain of Frumsemberg, and that he saw there, at a place called Hauwelen, a horrible serpent, its head raised on various *tortuous folds* which formed its body, in a colour of mixed grey and black; its length was seven feet at least, with a head resembling that of a cat, and without feet; he had wounded it with a musket blow and finally killed it with the aid of his father, Thomas Tinner. He added that, before the serpent was killed, the inhabitants of the surrounding area had complained that the cows had often been found without milk, as if someone had milked them; nobody knew what to attribute the cause to, but this malady ceased with the serpent's death." [**1**]

Its carcass was never preserved. Here is another testimony from Scheuchzer:



The "horrible" cat-headed serpent encountered by Jean Tinner on the Frumsemberg mountain, in (approximately) 1711. From J-J Scheuchzer, ***Itinera per Helvetiae..*** **(1723).** [Fortean Picture Library]

1 ■ J.J. Scheuchzer 1723.

The *Stollenwurm* of the Berne Juras was supposed to suckle from cows (C. de Plancy 1863).

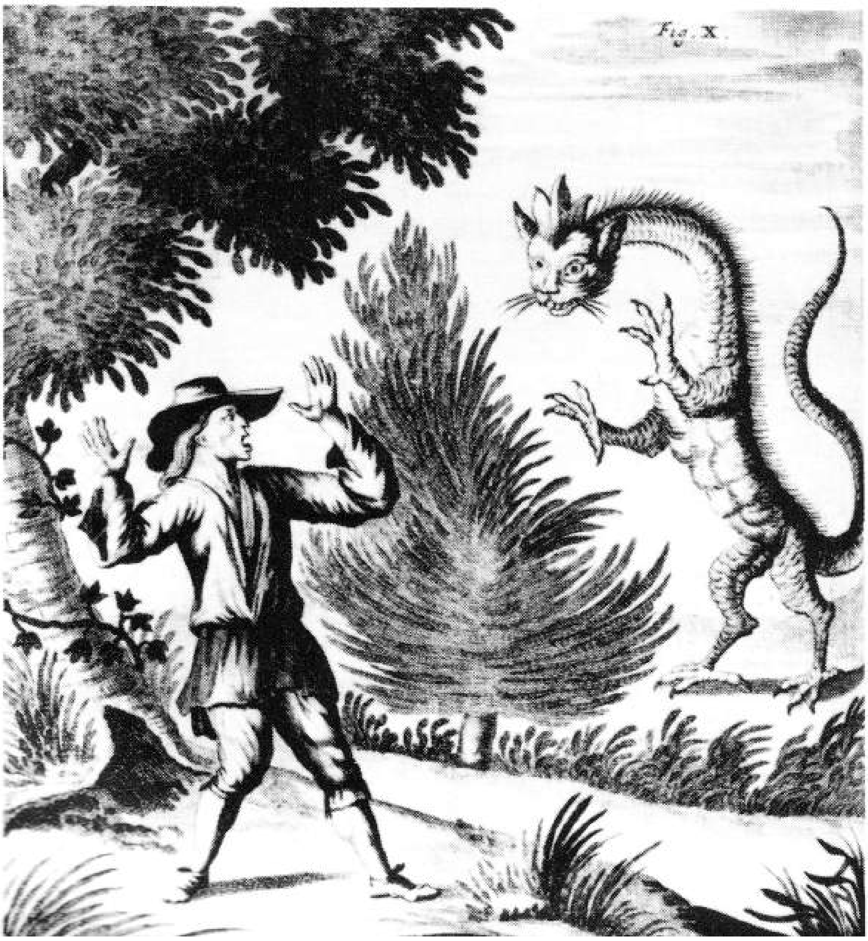
The "horse-head" of Blue-Sea Lake was attracted to the *cartons* of cream – see Chapter 1, p107 – and thus showed an appetite similar to the fabulous lizards of the European alps.

But this taste for milk, attributed to *all* serpent-like creatures of legend, does not correspond to zoological reptiles.

"Another Swiss, of the county of Sargans, Andreas Roduner, secretary and colour–bearer of the village of Altsax, around the year 1660 met, in the company of another person, on the mountain of Wangserberger, a dragon of *fearful size*, who, as soon as he saw them, stood on his hind feet, and in that position took on *the height of a man*. His body was covered with rough scales. He had four feet, ears, a ridge, a very long tail, and the face of a cat. Its stomach, from its front feet to its back feet, was *full of wrinkles or pouches*, separated by red veins, and its back was covered with *prickly hair like that of a boar*. Our two travellers saved themselves." [**2**]

This "lizard–with–a–cat's–head" haunts the accounts of mountaineers. It is the *Stollenwurm* of the countryside around Berne, the *Tatzelwurm* of Austria. The description "worms–with–legs" designated the short legs of the animal. The French Alps hid, in their caverns, the *Arassas*, with a body of a lizard, and a cat's head. [**3**] The *Dard* of the Poitevins had some traits in common with the dragon of Sargans: it was "a serpent with four legs and a very short tail like that of a snake, the head of a cat, and a *mane* which grew on its spine". [**4**]

Only the "long tail" of the Swiss beast is different here. But the exception makes a rule in this affair. The careful comparison of the Tatzelwurm descriptions shows differences: certain of them have two feet, some three, and others none at all; it is described as being hairy, scaly, blistered, or smooth. [**5**] The reptiles in Scheuchzer's collection offer analogous differences: two feet, four feet, no feet, or "fins of a fish". Those who claimed to have seen the Stollenwurm, speak sometimes of two, three, or six feet, and also of a cluster of "boils" [*"warzen"*] hanging from its stomach, on which it poises itself for action. [**6**] These



The quadruped dragon – also with a cat-like head – seen by Andreas Roduner on the Wangsberger mountain. From J-J Scheuchzer, *Itinera per Helvetiae..* **(1723).** [Fortean Picture Library]

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2 ■ J.J. Scheuchzer 1723.

3 ■ A. van Gennep 1946.

4 ■ H. Ellenberger, 'Le monde fantastique dans le folklore de la Vienne,' in *Nouvelle Revue des traditions populaires*, vol 1, 1949.

5 ■ J. Nicolussi, 'Der Tatzelwürm und seine Verwandtschaft,' in *Der Schlern*, vol 14, 1943.

6 ■ H. Dübi, 'Von drachen und stollenwürmen, in *Archives Suisses des traditions populaires*, vol 3, 1939.

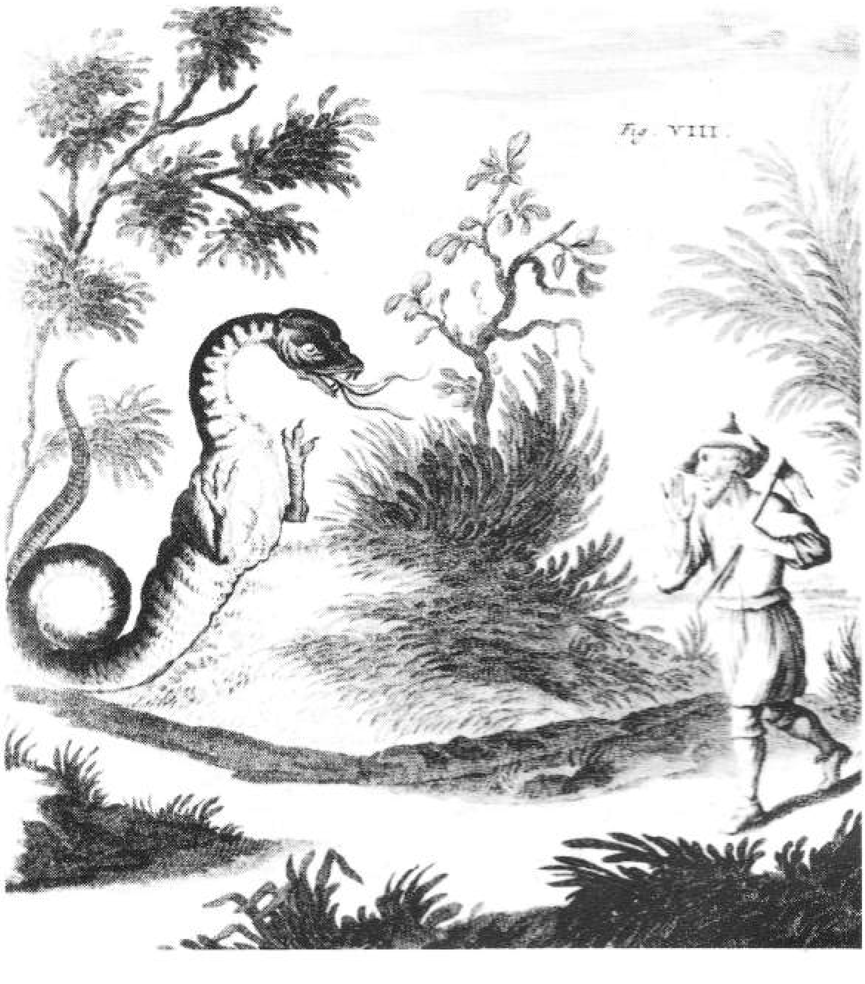
"boils" are the equivalent of the "pouches" of the dragon of Sargans.

The science–writer Willy Ley has written an article about Tatzelwurm, in which he presupposes an unknown beast. [7] But the strange lizard, to which the "Museum of Nature" at Salzburg has dedicated an explanatory plaque, is as elusive today as his big brothers from Loch Ness and Pohénégamook.

We cannot allow the singular adventure of a photographer from Berne to pass in silence. He had gone down into a ravine haunted by a Stollenwurm and is said to have seen, at the bottom of a mountain stream, a beast resembling a "crocodile, but much bigger". [**8**] Had the Tatzelwurm gone to seed? The research of Professor O. Steinböck of Innsbruck has, however, shown that most of the observers of the Tatzelwurm come from modest backgrounds (eg. hunters, poachers, shepherds, and peasants) and have a tendency to interpret what they see as a function of secular belief in the Tatzelwurm, and that behind many of the reports are mis-identifications of known beasts of alpine fauna (eg. lizard, grass–snakes, salamanders, and martens).

"The stories concerning the Tatzelwurm are not the reflection of an unknown beast, but conversely the Tatzelwurm is always identified with different known alpine beasts, as the concept of this fabulous animal is rooted among the people of our mountains by secular tradition," says Professor Steinböck. [**9**]

On the same lines, we can ask if the Austrian shepherds – like the Scandinavians – were not projecting traditional



A biped Swiss dragon; from J-J Scheuchzer, ***Itinera per Helvetiae..*** **(1723).** [Fortean Picture Library]

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7 ■ Willy Ley, 'Un animal inconnu dans les Alpes,' in *La Nature*, 1938.

8 ■ K. Meusberger, 'Neue Beiträge zur tatzelwürmfrage,' in *Der Schlern*, vol 9, 1928.

Some variants, indeed, interpret such creatures as *lake* monsters. According to tradition, the Italian church of Santa Maria di Campiglio conserved, until quite recent times, a bizarre fish with a cat's head, a dorsal mane and a pointed tail. The beast was 40cm long and was kept in a glass sphere suspended from the church vault. A shepherd is supposed to have killed it in a lake near Campei, in the Trentino, according to an account dating from 1673. (Meusberger 1928).

9 ■ *Schweizerisches archiv für volkskunde*, vol 20, 1916.

fabulous creatures onto local animals perceived as monsters under specific sighting conditions. This analysis can be generalized to encompass the experience of the Swiss *Elbst.* [10]

APPENDIX 2

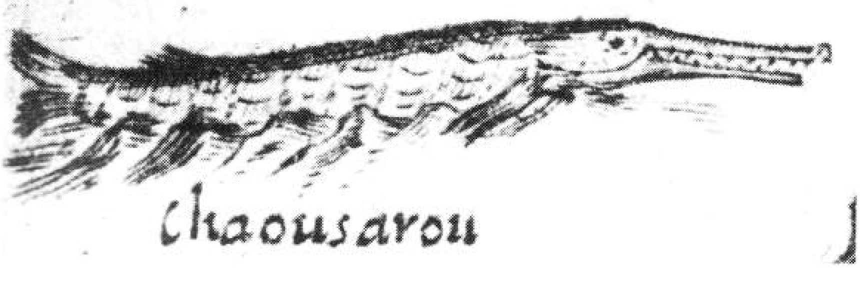
SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN'S 'SIGHTING'

The first entry on the signboard just outside Port Henry, NY., which lists the names of those who have seen Champ, and the dates of their sightings, reads " Samuel de Champlain 1609". He was, of course the Frenchman who gave his name to the lake, being the first European to venture into it. But there is no sign in his own accounts of his explorations that he had seen Champ's famous horse–headed profile, or even knew of the existence of such a monster in Lake Champlain.

In order to clarify the propagated misunderstandings about what Champlain actually saw, we give here the only passage in the 'official record' remotely related to such a noteworthy incident. It demonstrates the gap between what is known and what is perceived.

This extract occurs in chapter IX, in the second volume of Champlain's account of his explorations of the Saint–Lawrence and a few side rivers between 1608 and 1612, entitled: *Les Voyages faits au Grand Fleuve Sainct Laurens par le Sieur de Champlain Capitane Ordinaire pour le Roi en la marine, depuis l'année 1608 juaques en 1612*, published in two volumes in Paris, in 1613. [1]

Under the heading 'Description of a great lake', we read how Captain Champlain's team of marines and natives left the 'Iroquois River' (later named the Richelieu). *"On the following day we entered the lake which is some 80 or 100 leagues in length* [2], *in which I saw four beautiful islands about ten, twelve and fifteen leagues in length, which, like the Iroquois river, were formerly inhabited by Indians: but have been abandoned, since they have been at war with one another. There are also several rivers flowing into the lake, on whose banks are many fine trees of the same varieties we have in France, with many of the finest vines I had seen anywhere. There are many chestnut trees which I had only seen on the shore of this lake, in which there is also a great abundance of many species of fish. Amongst others there is one called by the natives* **Chaousarou**, *which is of various lengths; but the largest of them, as these tribes have told*



The *Chaousarou* from Champlain's map of 1612, in which he placed this fish in the region of the Great Lakes. It is also called the *'poisson armé'*, or armoured fish, because of its thick shiny scales and aggressive behaviour.

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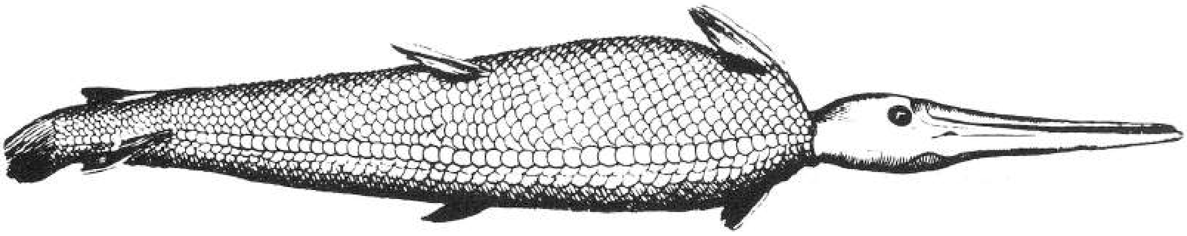
[10] O. Steinböck, 'Der tatzelwürm und die wissenschaft,' in *Der Schlern*, vol 15, 1934.

[1] Champlain 1925, vol 2. The account of the discovery of the "great lake" and of the *chaousarou*, procedes from p82.

[2] It is difficult to give the exact dimensions of such a large lake. Champlain's modern editor, H.P. Biggar, gives it as 125 miles (Champlain 1925, vol 2, p90). Joseph Zarzynski gives 109 miles (Zarzynski 1984, p29). Roy Mackal gives "over 100 miles long" (Mackal 1980, p217). The dimensions given momentarily by Champlain for the large islands are also exaggerated.

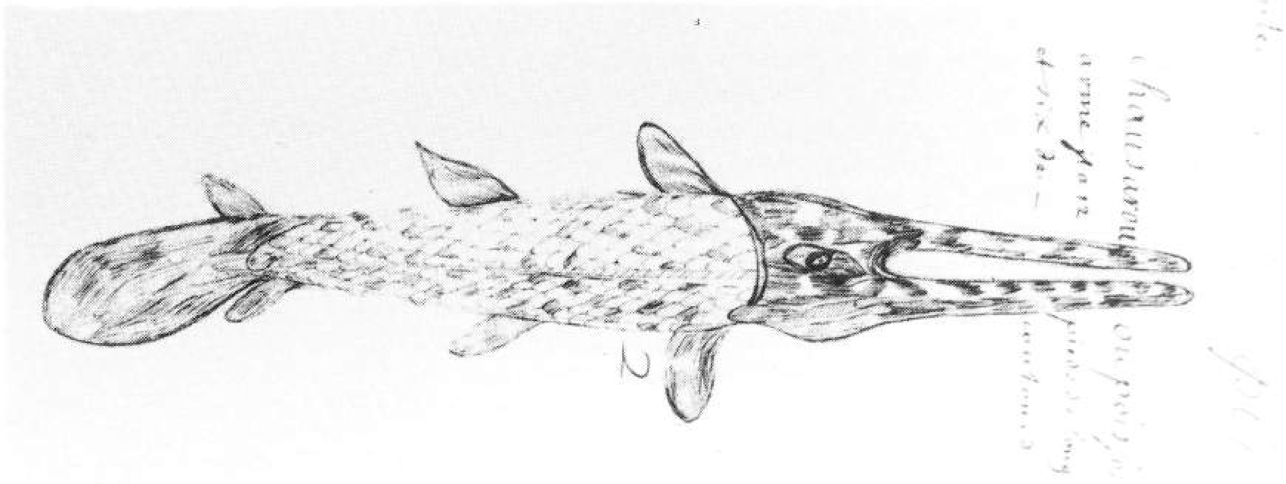


The *Chaousarou* **from the** *Historia Canadiensis* **(1664) of Father François du Creux.** [Fortean Picture Library]

me, are from eight to ten feet long. I have seen some five feet long, which were as big as my thigh, and had a head as large as my two fists, with a snout two feet and a half long, and a double row of very sharp, dangerous teeth. Its body has a good deal the shape of the pike; but it is protected by scales of a silvery gray colour and so strong that a dagger could not pierce them. The end of its snout is like a pig's. This fish makes war on all the other fish which are in these lakes and rivers. And, according to what these tribes have told me, it shows marvellous ingenuity in that, when it wishes to catch birds, it goes in amongst the rushes or reeds which lie along the shores of the lake in several places, and puts its snout out of the water without moving. The result is that when the birds come and light on its snout, mistaking it for a stump of wood, the fish is so cunning that, shutting its half–open mouth, it pulls them by their feet under the water. The natives gave me the head of one of them, a thing they prize highly, saying that when they have a headache, they bleed themselves with the teeth of this fish at the spot where the pain is and it eases them at once." After this the narrative moves on to other matters.

Champlain's record does not include description of any aquatic monster resembling the "humped horse–headed serpent" seen in recent times. What he does mention is a peculiar large fish, known to the Indians as 'Chaousarou', which can grow to heroic proportions, and which the editors of Champlain's works have unanimously thought to be a garfish or gar–pike. Like the sturgeon, it belongs to the family of ganoids (from the Greek *ganos*, meaning shiny, because of its

The drawing of the *Chaousarou*, **from the** *Natural history*... **(c1675) of Louis Nicolas.** [Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris]



enamel–covered scales).

Brian Vachon is typical of many modern writers who have perpetuated a falsehood through laziness. In his article about the Lake Champlain monster he writes: "The oldest hint about the existence of a strange animal has been given by the very man who gave his name to the lake." [3] He actually uses parts of Champlain's account, yet the name "Chaousarou" does not appear, giving the impression of an unknown animal. And what is worse is that he has taken the fragment of Champlain's account and presented it as part of a secular tradition, when he writes: "According to the stories that have been told for generations... " Such inaccuracies, enthusiastically copied and transmitted by journalists, eventually become 'established fact'.

This is why we believe it would be well to remove the name of Samuel de Champlain from the sign at Port Henry. With some good–will, we can admit that Champ can sometimes be perceived as a fish. After all, one 'appearance' of the monster of Lake Memphrémagog is that of a huge pike with thick shiny scales, very like the description of the Chaousarou. But it is useless to twist the 1609 text to prove such a thing! In fact, if we re–read Champlain's record very carefully, we can see that the founder of New France is not telling us about a personal observation of an exceptional animal, but condensing what the Indians told him with the souvenirs of the expedition's own catches. Under the magic wand of sensationalism, the simple note of an unexperienced naturalist becomes 'rare testimony', and the explorer becomes godfather to a monster he never saw!

APPENDIX 3

THE ALLIGATORS OF LAKE MEMPHRÉMAGOG

As the old edition of this book was being typeset (in 1982), we met someone who provided us with some basic information about the Memphrémagog monster. Mrs Adelaide Atkin, from Georgeville, welcomed us to her pretty white house, situated quite close to the lake.

Because she is interested in the mysteries of the the lakes of Québec, she was led to record several testimonies about their suspected inhabitants, the most important of which she published in an article in the *Stanstead Journal* in 1953. [1]

Dr Curtis Classen, a military surgeon from Brooklyn, owned a villa by the lake, near Kove Kamp. On 26th October 1935, he was burning some brushwood on the shore... "It was an icy–cold day with intermitant squalls of snow; the doctor, his back towards the lake, was watching the fire when he felt something staring at him." He glanced casually at the water and saw a reptile, looking very like an alligator, crawl out of the water onto the bank. Alarmed, he rushed back to his house, and related the extraordinary scene to his wife and a friend, Miss Winona Hutchins. Both women scarcely believed him, and going to the area, they were just in time to see an alligator–like back retreat

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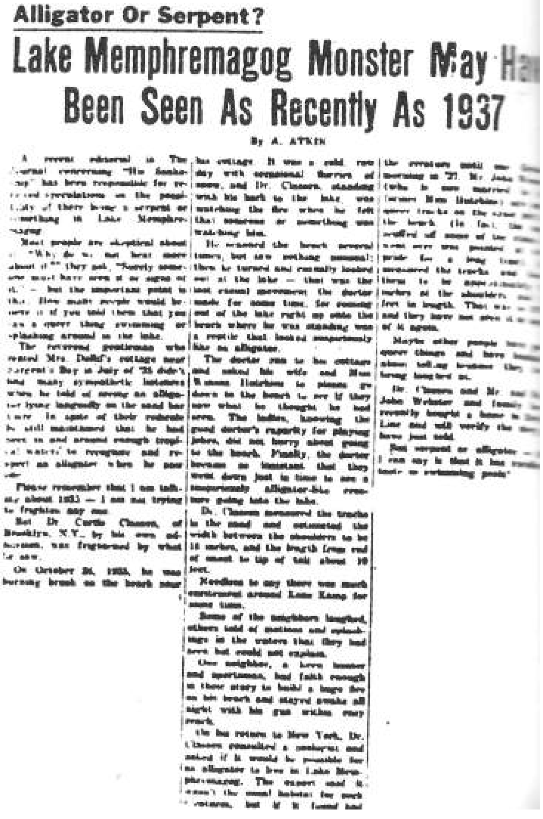
[3] Brian Vachon, 'Le monstre du lac Champlain,' in *Sélection* Readers' Digest), November 1978.

[1] A. Atkin, 'Alligator or Serpent? Lake Memphrémagog Monster may have been seen as recently as 1937,' in *Stanstead Journal*, Rock Island, N°35, 1953 [see below].



Alligator Or Serpent?

Lake Memphremagog Monster May

Been Seen As Recently As 1937

By A. ATKIN

into the lake and some prints on the sandy shore.

In a letter to Mrs Atkin, dated 27th August 1953, Dr Classen says: "We estimated that the creature was 18 inches wide and 10 feet long." The neighbourhood was in uproar when the doctor's experience became known. Some laughed, but others recalled strange tracks and inexplicable wakes. One hunter camped all night in a hide on the shore, his gun within reach. When he returned to New York, Dr Classen took the advice of a zoologist, who told him that an alligator might be able to live in such a lake if its lair was near a warm spring. There are, indeed, such springs at Bay View Point.

There was no further news of the alligator–like creature until one morning in October 1937, when John Webster spotted strange prints on the same beach. His estimate of the animal's length was about 11 feet, and he put its width at about 20 inches. Later, he proudly showed where, he claimed, moss had been scraped off pebbles by the claws of the creature.

It is a pity that neither Dr Classen nor Mr Webster took any photographs of the prints, or drew them. Here we have proof, of a sort, that the monster of Memphrémagog is sometimes conceived as amphibious, and like Ogopogo, can venture onto the bank.

These "crocodiles" of 1935–1937 are related to the "crocodile" of Lake Pohénégamook and the "crocodile head" of Lake Saint–Francis. They must be added to the catalogue of the Memphrémagog menagerie, which already includes the "long–necked seal", the "grass–snake", the "giant pike", the "living log" and of course the "horse's head". They might all be species of the same animal.

Mrs Atkin also played two tapes to us: in one of them an informant explains what happened to a certain Hank Dewey, of Stanstead, sometime between 1966 and 1967. "He liked fishing and hunting. One day, he went fishing with two passengers in his little boat. They were not far from the bank, within sight of *Molson Island*. Suddenly, 'a big fish', as he called it, but *it did not look like a fish*, surfaced near the bank. This *fish or snake* frightened the women when it started *to chase their boat*, and it followed them until they had moored. The women were so frightened that they never again went on the lake." The behaviour of this strange "fish" reminds us of the "red–eyed horse" which charged Mrs Hick's boat in 1972. Molson Island, the place of Hank Dewey's misadventure, is not far from Kove Kamp, the beach visited by the 1935–1937 "alligators".

Our last story involves six witnesses, who were swimming in Fitch Bay, on a nice day in 1979. "The lake was very quiet. As the swimmers were getting dressed, one of them saw a very long wave coming towards the shore. He called his friends and they all saw something which *looked like a submarine*. The back of the creature was ornamented with a row of objects; it was not an irregular indentation, but more like *a row of small pipes*. They did not see any 'head'. Suddenly the object or animal disappeared in front of their eyes, without making any waves. One of the witnesses, Doris Crawford, said she had seen on the television a creature from British Columbia exactly like the one they had observed."

This "creature from British Columbia" is very probably Ogopogo. It was at Fitch Bay that the "long–necked seal" was noticed in 1975–1976. This "submarine" reminds us of the strange "submarines" of Lake Aylmer and Lake Saint–Francis – and the "row of small pipes" on its back recalls the "periscope" seen by Mr Dostie. [2]

How can we admit the existence of the monster of Lake Memphrémagog, which one day displays the "big scales" seen by Mrs Hicks [3] and the next these strange "pipes", and which can be seen as "half–serpent, half–horse", a giant "pike" and an "alligator"? The only solution is cultural. What the Magog residents today call "the monster" is in fact an amalgam of formerly distinct ideological layers, each with its independent monstrous morphologies, the serpent–horse being the oldest and the more mythical, and the "big fish" an effort to save the monster by rationalizing it.

These various definitions of the monstrous are anterior to the sightings and help to sharpen the contents of generally blurred observations. There is also a fixed number of monstrous forms and they tend to be distributed in *each* lake, not according to any zoological law but to the convergency of traditional channels of communication, coalescing in a full–blown local myth.

[2] ■ See Chapter 1, p69ff.

APPENDIX 4

THE DEPOSITION OF MRS HICKS [1]

To Whom it May Concern:

Seen in Lake Memphrémagog, Newport, Vermont; Summer, about 1972, at 10pm; clear, warm night.

A creature which had the resemblance of a face somewhat like a horse, with two very red eyes and a body which was hard to judge as far as length, about 75 to 100 feet long. The water around the creature when first seen looked like it was irridescent. The neck appeared to be very long; the back of the creature had somewhat of an appearance like scales, large ones. It is hard to estimate the girth of the creature but it seemed to be very round. The sighting of this creature was down the Mountains where the water is very deep. It was fairly near the shoreline. A spot light was put on it from the boat and then it started to come for the boat. It rolled over near the boat causing the boat to be very tippy. It shorted out the boat motor.

Helen Hicks: 195 West Main, Newport, Vermont. (Tel: 334–2554.)

[1] ■ Translated by William D. Gaucher.

APPENDIX 5

THE SHEPHERD OF THE FISHES

Ugro–Finnish and Germanic people are associated with the elaboration of an analogous mythic figure: the "King or Queen of the Fishes", or "Guardian of the Lake": a kind of "Shepherd of the Animals of the Waters".

Among the Germans of Voigtland, the "Mother of the Fishes" is said to live in a gulf situated on the River Elster. *"Each time that the monster shows itself, a man has been drowned, a fire, plague, the cost of living goes up and wars break out in the country."* [**1**]

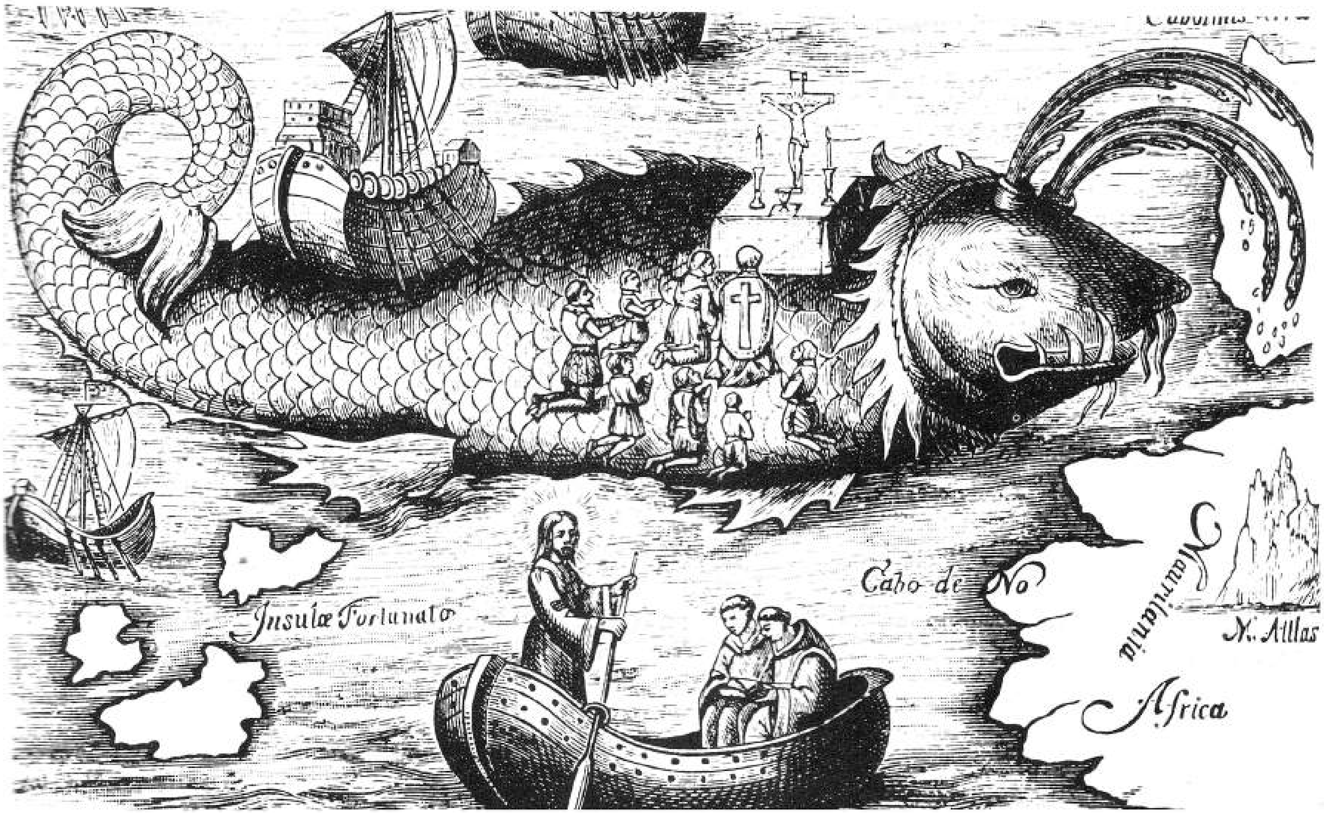
Downstream on the same river, in Thuringia, a hollow under a rock sheltered *"a giant fish which required a human sacrifice every five years."* [**2**] These monarchs of the aquatic fauna distinguish themselves from other fish by one detail: often they cover themselves with moss, attesting to their status as "ancients". In Rhineland, for example, the pikes haunting a feared gulf in the Moselle are "a thousand years old and the moss grows on their heads". [**3**]

Sometimes they have so many centuries behind them that a tree has taken root on their backs. The "Queen of the Waters" of the lake of Ballon, in Alsace, is said to be "an enormous mossy trout, on whose back grows a sort of small pine". [**4**] The motif is so widespread that the serpent *Lik*, "Master of the Water" of Gran Chaco, in South America, carries "a palm tree on its back". [**5**] The *maskinongé* "as big as a boat", in the lake of the same name, may well be one of these 'Fish Kings'.

The Sisiutl of the Amerindians may be *both* a simple salmon and a bicephalic serpent. It seems that for the Europeans, the "Great Fish" and the serpent were, at the level of myth, considered to be two possible aspects of the same creature, the "Guardian of the Lake". Their lairs are often the same; the abyss in the Moselle where thousand–year–old pikes swim was also the domain of the "giant serpents, which get tangled in fish nets". [**6**]

This identity of essence would explain why the attributes, typical of Ponik, are found on the backs of creatures clearly designated as fish. Among the Estonians the "Guardian of the Fishes" is a fish–shaped giant whose back is festooned with the famous *saw–toothed ridge.* [**7**]

The exploits of the Irish Saint Brendan (c486–578), known as the Navigator, include many legendary epidodes. In one indicent he and his crew allegedly held a mass on a small mid-Atlantic island, which turned out to be a huge whale. This story is a stereotype of the island-that-comes-alive motif. [Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library}



[1] ■ R. Eisel 1871.

[2] ■ A. Witzchel 1878.

[3] ■ P. Zaunert 1924, vol 2.

[4] ■ J. Variot 1936.

[5] ■ O. Zerries 1954.

[6] ■ Lutz Röhrich, 'Europäische Wildgeistersagen', in *Rheinisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde*, vol 10, 1960, pp79-162.

[7] ■ C. Hentze 1955.

APPENDIX 6

THE MYTHICAL LANDSCAPE OF CHILE

"It was a great grey-black hood of horror moving over the floor of the sea [...] It was plastic, essentially shapeless. It could shoot out long tentacles, until it bore a resemblance to a nightmare squid or a huge starfish; it could retract itself into a round flattened disk, or squeeze into an irregular hunched shape so that it looked like a black boulder sunk on the bottom of the sea."
Joseph Payne Brennan, *Slime* (1953).

"And now we rushed into the embrace of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us."
E.A. Poe, *The narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838).

ENGULFING HIDES AND LIVING EDDIES

A cycle of South American legends include many of the motifs we have already studied in North America. They are clustered around the Chilean sea and fishing grounds. Their function is to give traditional explanations to disappearances in the Pacific Ocean, as well as in lakes or rivers. I will deal, therefore with a *folklore of the lost.*

From the island of Chiloé to the Magellan Strait and around Cape Horn there extends a tormented coast, indented with innumerable half-hidden creeks and channels between archepelagos. On the map it looks like a barbed hook, and so it is; ever since the beginnings of shipping whole fleets have been harpooned by its jagged reefs. Only a few sailors have escaped drowning. One of them – the Scot, Alexander Selkirk – found a bleak haven on the Chilean island of Juan Fernandez and became the model for Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. [1]

For a long time afterwards. shipwrecked fishermen and buccaneers followed the tracks of Man Friday, along rocky shores or behind the trees of the *Boscosa*, the Patagonian forest. Therefore the idea of a colony of castaways, surviving on some unknown part of the savage Chilean coast, was not unthinkable. This concept generated a great myth; the dream of a whole city of the shipwrecked, in the undiscovered land of *Trapalandra*, towards the Magellan Strait. The search for this metropolis – called "the City of the Caesars" (*"la Ciudad de los Cesares"*) – has occupied numerous expeditions, often setting out from Chiloé, such as the enterprise of Father Nicolas Mascardi, in 1670, and with just as little success. The Lost City has never been discovered. [**2**]

Yet, we dispose of the testimony of sailors who pretended to have lived among the "Cesares". Two of them even left a written description of the marvels of the hidden city to their descendents. [**3**] From the aviators on the backs of dragons to the travelled guests of UFO entities, throughout history there have been people claiming to have experienced legend as reality, to have tasted the fruits of the unapproachable island of

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[1] See B. Vicuña-Mackenzie 1883.

[2] A. Weber 1903.

[3] P. Guevara 1836, p149.

Father Ignatius Molina; from his *Saggio sulla storia naturale del Chili* **(1810).** [Fortean Picture Library]

St Brendan, or tamed white unicorns. Nevertheless, the *"Ciudad de los Cesares"* has remained only a beautiful name on ancient maps.

The Magellan Strait was also the location of other myths, such as the belief in the giant Patagonians. [**4**] In 1712, the Amerindians of Chiloé swore to the traveller Frezier that such giants – called by them *"Chaucahues"* – were really living in the wilds. Some of them even came to the residences of the Spanish settlers. [**5**] Myths woven around disappearances were not restricted to the Chilean coast. River fords claimed quite a number of the drowned. A specific *whirlpool-lore* had grown, interpreting swirling currents and eddies as the abode of fearful monsters.

Such beings did not escape the curious pen of the learned Jesuit–naturalist Juan-Ignacio Molina (1740–1829). While living in exile in Italy – like Olaus Magnus – the Chilean prelate wrote, in the language of his host country, his famous *Essay on the natural history of Chile* (1782). From it, we select the following passage: "the Indians pretend that in certain lakes in Chili is to be found a fish or *dragon* of monstrous size, which they call *'Glyryvilu'*, that is *'Vulpangue'*, or the 'fox-serpent'. They believe that it devours men, and on that account never bathe in those lakes. But the description which they give of its size and form scarcely agree; some representing it longish, like a serpent with the head of a fox, other as being nearly circular, and resembling an outstretched ox-hide. If it exists as described, it would be a sort of *"manta"* or monster. But it is probable that such a thing has no more reality than the Lernaean Hydra, or than the monster imagined a few years ago by a Chilean countryman to get rid of a tiresome neighbour, and described by many European popular broadsheets as really living in a Chilean lake." [**6**] Molina's last comment refers to a magnificent hoax, stories of which had rocked European readership in the 1780s; the heavily publicized account of the "unrivalled monster" of Lake Fagua, in Chile [see illustration on p277].

The time was ripe for new fears, new curiosities and new humbugs. The first manned balloon *(aerostat)* to rise before Parisians, in 1784, was taken for a monster when it fell near a village and was 'killed' with pitchforks. Between 1783 and 1785 numerous engravings were published proclaiming fictional ascents in fantasy balloons, with giant nacelles like sea-going vessels complete with bowsprits and gunports. The real conquest of the air had generated an imaginary territory, full of wonderful prototypes that could never fly but which enlarged our dreams. Correspondingly, the first methodical investigation of paleontological remains produced marvellous expectation. In the year Molina's treatise was published – 1782 – the *Journal de Physique* interpreted Eskimo and Amerindian legends to surmise the existence of living mammoths in Canada, and of a bear larger than an elephant in the wilds of Greenland. [**7**]

The rationalistic deciphering of native traditions, coupled with a desire to animate the bones of fossils, created a whole zoo of spurious crypto-beasts. The anonymous author of the Fagua lake-monster hoax plainly knew how to play on such hopes. In his commentary to the "unrivalled monster", he states

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[4] ■ R.T. Gould 1919, pp13-30.

[5] ■ De Pauw 1770, vol 3, p53.

[6] ■ J.I. Molina 1809, p191.
I have used the English edition of Molina (1809), correcting it with the second Italian edition (1810).

[7] ■ See P. Denys de Montfort 1801-1802, vol 2, pp378-379.

that the creature had been shipped to Cadiz, and would later be presented to the King of Spain. [8] This monarch was Charles III, a lover of the outdoor life whom Goya had painted in hunting dress. When the king received, in 1788, the giant skeleton of the Megatherium discovered in Paraguay, he asked the local Crown officers to launch a hunt for a living specimen. [9] If legend seemed to come to life, why not mythology? The editor of the Chilean hoax ends his description of the monster with these words: "This creature seems to be one of the Harpies, which *were so far considered to be fabulous*." [10]

If we re-read Molina's text with this background in mind, we will see that the Chilean Jesuit was obviously torn between his well-founded scientific caution, and a very common desire to establish a natural basis for the native legend. Molina calls the *Glyryvilu* a *dragon*, thereby annexing it to European monsterdom. This *Glyryvilu* combines two Araucanian water monsters that will be separated by later sources: the *"Guirivilu"* and the *"Trelquehuecuve"*.

The *Guirivilu*, the fox-snake, is sometimes represented with a long entwining tail, armed with a strong claw at the end. [11] This detail had been reproduced in the engraving of the monster of Lake Fagua; its scaly tail is coiled like a tentacle around the body of a pig. The second water-beast, the *Trelquehuecuve*, is described as a "sort of octopus" living in rivers and lakes, with a roundish shape fringed with claws. It can leave the water to bask on the banks. [12] A variant is the *"Cuero"* ("Hide"), which shows itself as an extended cow-hide, its circumference set with countless little eyes, and four great eyes where the head should be. [13] At Chiloé, fishermen feared a sea-going version of these creatures, a "hide" called *"Manta"* which enfolded swimmers. [14]

The *Guirivilu* and the underwater felines of North America form related representations. The bizarre *Cuero* seems, also, to be a Chilean cousin of the Swiss monster, *Butatsch-cun-Ilgs*. [15] Such creatures will never be caught, or bob in a giant aquarium to relieve the boredom of Sunday people. They belong to the realm of human creativity, incarnating the dread of drowning. Their morphology is built upon a single basic form, the curve: the claws, tentacular tail and circular body express the gripping, enfolding and sucking forces of the eddy. One appendage can be replaced by another; the folds of the *Trelquehuecuve* by claw-tipped "arms". [16] What counts is the symbolic function; these Chilean fauna also correspond to the "octopuses" of African rivers, and to other creatures of the Dark Continent, whose gripping appendage is a set of slender, whip-like *whiskers* [17]

Octopus-like fresh water monsters are, in fact, more *archaic* than the various types of water-horse because they are reduced to a mass; a pouch which kills by fastening itself to the swimmer's body and squeezing. [18]. *Between the Guirivilu* and the *Trelquehuecuve* there are few distinct elements; there is no autonomous definition. Therefore Father Molina cannot separate the various descriptions by using rationalistic methodology to reach a degree of separate objectivity. The body of such creatures is never described as a whole, because it is structured

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8 ■ *Courier de l'Europe* 22 & 29 October 1784; cited in R. Darnton 1968, pp31-32.

9 ■ B. Heuvelmans 1955, p11.

10 ■ R. Darnton 1968.

11 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, pp65-66.

12 ■ *ibidem* p39.

13 ■ *ibidem* pp38-39.

14 ■ *ibidem* p39.

15 ■ See Chapter 2, p138; and the *Elbst* at Chapter 5, p259; and the *Imap Umassoursua* of Greenland at Chapter 4, p220.

16 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, p39.

17 ■ See B. Heuvelmans 1978, pp272-275, and 362-367.

Compare, also, the "Hide" with the *"A-mi-kuk"* of the Bering Straits Eskimos, described as a "large, slimy, leathery-skinned animal with four long arms". If it pursues a man to the shore, "the creature will swim through the earth in pursuit as easily as through the water. Near St Michael, the people believe that these creatures swim from the sea, up through the land, to *some land-locked lakes in the craters of extinct volcanoes* and to similar inland places." For Nelson "the idea of this creature may have had its origin in the octopus." (E.W. Nelson, 1899, p442.)

18 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, p39.

19 ■ *Cucioteuthis unguiculata*.

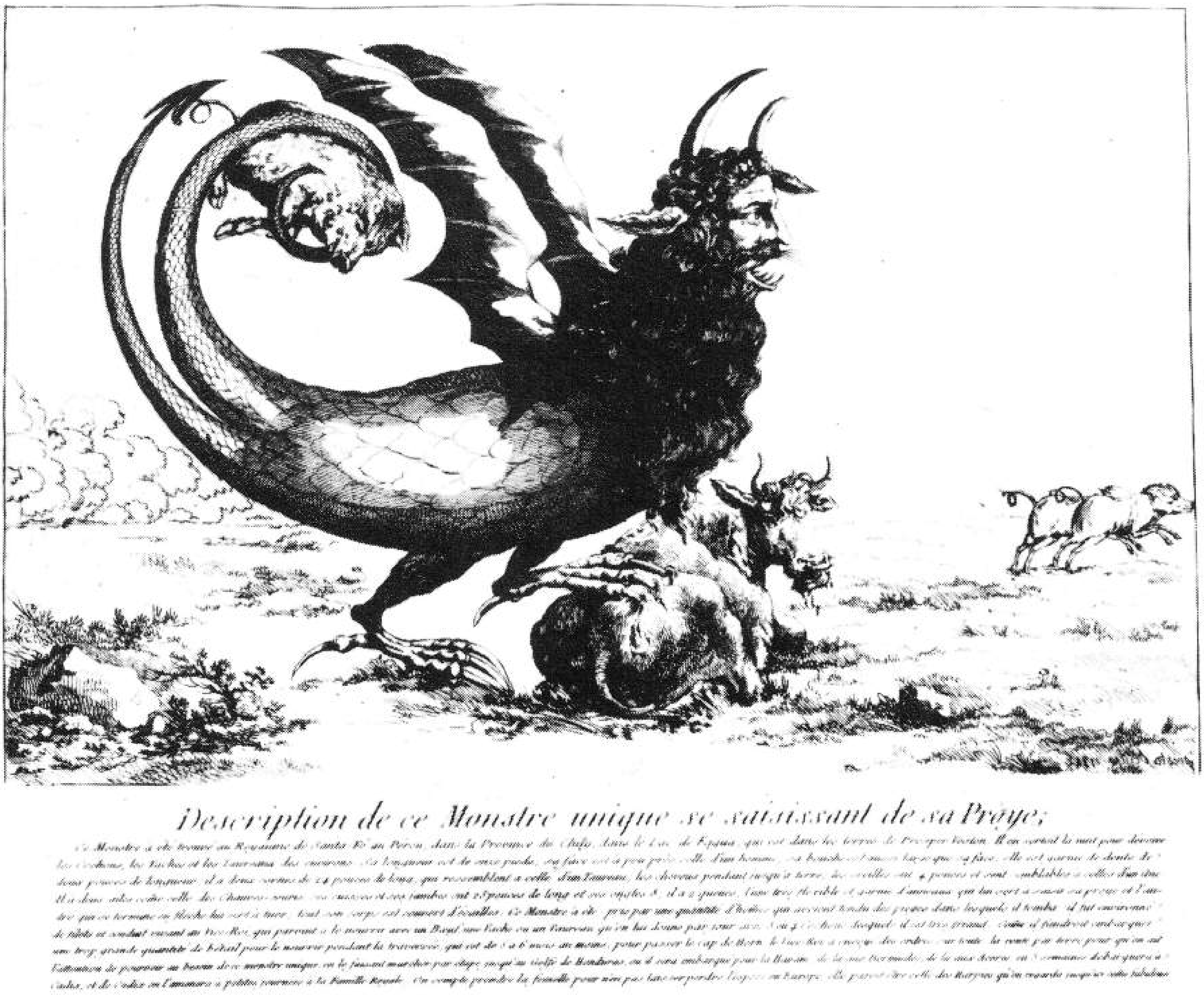
20 ■ J.I. Molina 1809, p164.

On the *"Sepia unguiculata"* of Molina, see also B. Heuvelmans 1958, vol 1, pp244-245.

21 ■ C. Gay 1854, vol 8, pp21-22.

22 ■ J.I. Molina 1809, p164.

23 ■ E. Gerdts-Rupp 1937, p84.


Description de ce Monstre unique se saisissant de sa Proye;

The monster of Lake Fagua, Chile. According to a French broadsheet, of October 1784, it was 11 feet long and had a human face, a flowing mane, a bull's horns, donkey's ears, and a bat's wings. "It has two tails: one, extremely flexible and furnished with rings which it uses to grip its prey, and the other, ending in an arrow-head is used to kill the prey." Compare this tail with the entwining claw-tipped tail of the *Guirivilu*.

"This monster frequently emerged from Lake Fagua at night to devour pigs, cows and bulls. It has even been caught using nets; but needs feeding daily with an ox, cow or bull and three or four pigs."

[Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris]

around only the clutching organs borrowed from various living creatures.

The tail of the *Guirivilu*, with its terminal claw, calls forth a living star, perhaps an elaboration of the hooked tentacles of the unguiculated squid of Chile's Pacific coast. [19] Molina describes it, confusing it with a cuttlefish: "instead of suckers it has paws armed with a double row of pointed nails, like those of a cat, which it can, at its pleasure, draw into a kind of sheath." [20]

The *Manta* of Chilean fishermen seems to be a legendary form of the creature called the "truncated cuttle-fish (*Sepia tunicata*)" by the Jesuit, and interpreted by others as the *Ommastrephes gigas* or giant squid. [21] Molina says that "many wonderful and incredible stories are told by sailors of the bulk and strength of this fish, but it is certain that it is frequently caught of one hundred and fifty pounds weight on the coast of Chile." [22]

The "tunic" of this sea-beast is locally called "*manta*". [23] For Father Molina, the *Glyryvilu*, if it existed – and the scholar had his doubts – was tentatively some fresh water form of the *Manta*, or Pacific cuttlefish. Are Chilean rivers inhabited by a yet unknown sort of giant mollusc? I don't think so. The myriad eyes of the *Cuero* point towards a very different explanation related to the universal belief in the power of *fascination* ascribed to the *evil eye*. The profusion of eyes on the *Cuero* may be a reinforcing of this magic strength, along the same lines of thought that lead Eskimo artists to award their sea-monster, the *Păl-rai-yûk*, three stomachs instead of one; they wanted to underline the uncommon voracity of such beings. **[24]** The proliferation of eyes over the body of the "Hide" may represent a concatenation of its attractive power; an enhanced capability to draw people under water against their will.

This interpretation is reinforced by the creature's name. Analyzing the word *'Trelquehuecuve'*, Jacques Soustelle has shown that it contains the important root *"huecuve"* meaning an animal skin ("hide"), and also the mysterious cause of unexplained phenomena, such as the weird sounds to be heard in Chilean mines. The "Hide" is therefore only the *embodiment* of a supernatural force which is mainly evil, the *Huecuve* **[25]**. This corresponds to the legendary origin of the *Cuero* as a simple "donkey hide" which fell into a river in which it came alive and "unrolled". **[26]**

The life-giving principle was considered to be some magical "power". The traditional medicine men of the Araucanians – the *Machis* – imputed all diseases to evil spirits, called *Huecuvu*; symptoms were dramatized into an imaginary encounter with the *Huecuvu*, which enfolded the victim into a whirlwind to transport him to its subterranean lair. **[27]** The attacks of the water-monster seem, therefore, to correspond more to assaults by an animal skin animated by a demon, rather than to any objective phenomenon. The *Trelquehuecuve* and the *Guirivilu* were indeed credited with the power to create a strong whirlwind to snatch people on the banks, or to *form the eddies*. **[28]** The swirl of dust and the whirlpool were thus considered to be emanations of the bad *Huecuvu*.

We have seen how, in Europe and North America, vortices and water-monsters were closely related. **[29]** In Chile, the *Machi*, as specialists in the fight against all bad *Huecuvu*, can also exorcise eddies, that is to say, compel the demon-monster to move away. A traditional story tells how a group of Amerindians payed a heavy price to a *Machi* to deliver them from a murderous whirlpool close to a ford. The shaman came with all his magical equipment and plunged into the eddy. When he returned to the surface he was clutching a "little beast", the *Guirivilu*. The *Machi* threatened the creature, promising to cut off its ears and feet if it did not leave the ford. After this ritual was completed, and "before the end of the year", *the whirlpool vanished*. **[30]**

If its "master" was an invisible being, the "Hide" itself was considered to be material. Therfore, encounters with the *Trelquehuecuve* are recorded. **[31]** But on what level? The apparent objectivity of such narratives have placed the "Hide" in the same orbit as Nessie and made a trap for monster enthusiasts. A "Hide" was once localized in Lake Lacar, in Argentina, and described by a Gaucho (a non-Indian herd-rider) as "a large hide floating in a hump-backed manner on the surface." This mention of "humps" has prompted cryptozoologist Peter Costello to compare the *Cuero* with the

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24 ■ See Chapter 3, p168.

25 ■ J. Soustelle & G. Soustelle 1938, p53.

26 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, p38.

27 ■ E. Gerdts-Rupp 1937, pp51-52.

28 ■ *ibidem* p84.
According to the traditions of the natives around Lake Tanganyika, in Africa, mysterious disappearances of their fishing boats are blamed upon the *"Pamba"*, a huge "fish-like" monster with the head and horns of a bull. "It spouts like a whale and also causes *wind-like eddies* on the surface of the lake." (W.L. Speight, 'Mystery monsters in Africa',, in *Empire Review*, vol.71, 1940, p225f.)

29 ■ See Chapter 2, Section 4.

30 ■ E. Gerdts-Rupp 1937, p83.
The Icelandic water-horse, *Nykur*, too, was associated with the perilous crossings of lakes and rivers, "especially those with strong currents... " (J. Simpson 1972, p96f.) A ford is a boundary of sorts, between land and water, the shallows and the depths, and between safety and danger, and the *Nykur* is its guardian, as was the Swedish variant, *Näcken* (see caption at Chapter 1, p82.)
An Araucanian, Nahuelpi, told Lehmann-Nitsche that Lake Aluminé was made dangerous by the numerous "fox serpents" that live in it, who drown horses with their long tails, adding that "they are not so destructive when they are worshipped." When he was a child of eight years, Nahuelpi said, he saw members of his tribe butchering a young *white* bull, and throwing its flesh into the water as an offering to the fox-serpent calling to it: "Father, water's Master, *White Chest!*" According to Nahuelpi: "The fox-serpent never showed itself to Christians, despite their wishes to see it." (R. Lehmann-Nitsche, 'La pretendia existencia actual del grypotherium', in *Revista del Museo de la Plata*, vol 10, 1902, p277f.)

31 ■ Informant Lorenzo Manquian told how, while a child and living on a riverbank, he made a strange discovery one evening, close to the water's edge: "I saw a thing like a calf's hide lying on a big stone. Its colour was brown with whitish patches. The hide was fringed with claws." Lorenzo ran back to his house and returned with his father. They approached with caution, because they knew the *Trelquehuecuve* can churn the water to form a whirlpool, and can attract passers-by, killing them with its claws. But there was nothing on the rock. His father told Lorenzo that if he had not run away in time, there would have been a

Loch Ness Monster. [32] This example shows clearly how the Scottish monster has become a model, colonizing other lakes and representations throughout the world.

The *Guirivilu* and the *Trelquehuecuve* are not the only water-monsters in Chilean folklore. Natives along the coast were *seal-hunters*, and we have already seen how, on the west coast of Norway, the forms of the sea-monster belief were intimately connected to the socio-economic activities there. Nordic seal-hunters had adapted the image of the sea-horse and sea-cow to their familiar world of sea-mammals. Each individual member of such societies, as a potential witness of a sea-monster, was also a potential upholder of tradition whose sighting might be adjusted to fit the seal-hunter's group patterning. [33] Like other seal-hunting societies, the Chileans have also integrated the sea-horse and sea-cow into their fabulous pantheon.

Molina says, about the sea-cow: "There are occasionally seen upon the coast of Araucania, certain animals called by the Indians 'sea-cows'. From the imperfect descriptions which I have recorded of them, I cannot determine whether they are manatees, *morses*, or a species of *Phocæ*, I am, however, more inclined to believe them to be *manatees*, because a great number of these animals were found by the first Spanish settlers of Juan Fernandez on the shores of that great island." [34] Nordic scholars, trying to put speculative flesh upon the bones of legend, interpreted the sea-cow as an exotic manatee or as the great *Rhytina stelleri*. [35] Here, Father Molina is proceeding along the same path; the poor manatee has to leave its temperate waters to freeze with Robinson Crusoe.

Later on, while classifying Chilean quadrupeds, the Jesuit sets apart some creatures about which he has only "imperfect descriptions". One of these "new species" is a fresh water variant of the sea-horse: "Of this kind is likewise the Hippopotamus of the rivers and lakes of Arauco, which is different from that of Africa, and in its form and stature resembles the horse, but *the feet are palmated like those of the seal*. The existence of this animal is universally credited throughout the country, and there are some persons who pretend to have seen the skin, which, they say, is covered with a very soft and sleek hair resembling in colour that of the *sea-wolf*." [36]

This Chilean fresh-water-horse sounds like the *Havhest* of western Norway; both have seal-like limbs. Molina's creature is clearly modelled, like its Nordic counterpart, upon the morphology of the prey of local seal-hunters, the *sea-wolf*, that he says the inhabitants kill in great numbers every year. [37] Here, as elsewhere, a pragmatic knowledge of the fauna, far from excluding myth, actually allows it multiple embodiments. Pontoppidan told us about a table-cloth made from the skin of a sea-serpent [38]; the pelt of Father Molina's river-horse obviously comes from the same tannery.

The Jesuit informs us that the Chiloé islanders were dedicated seal-hunters, and that "the oil which is obtained from the fat of the seal forms a considerable article of their commerce." [39] We will see later how seal-lore was also incorporated into the island's stories of witches, for on Chiloé various borrowings

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[Note continued from previous page.] tragedy. (E. Gerdts-Rupp 1937, p84.)

This story offers all the conditions for the mythicizing of a common object, distorted by twilight and interpreted according to collective belief.

32 ■ M. Burton 1961, pp94-95. Cited in P. Costello 1975 [1974] p266f.

33 ■ See Chapter 4, Section 4.

34 ■ J.I. Molina 1809, p190.

35 ■ See Chapter 4, Section 4.

36 ■ J.I. Molina 1809, p227.

37 ■ *ibidem* p231.

38 ■ See Introduction, Note 55, p24.

39 ■ J.I. Molina 1809, p231.

from the seal-myths may have formed the formidable representation of the *Camahueto*, another local monster. Some versions call it a "sea-horse" and because they also say that it is born in fresh water and migrates to the sea when it is fully grown [**40**], we can consider it, on one level, to be a massive version of Molina's water-horse. Other informants imply that the beast looks more like a *calf* [**41**], which brings us nearer to the image of a sea-cow.

Nevetheless, the *Camahueto* furnishes us with the traditional explanation for *disappearances at sea*. According to legend, the monster has altered the coastal landscape, creating deep crevices and dangerous coves; with its strong claws and sharp teeth, the giant creature had chewed the rosks and bored into the cliffs, creating traps for boats. [**42**] The *Camahueto* is therefore responsible for the jagged reefs, just as the *Trelquehuecuve* is responsible for the eddies: both are structured images of drowning. When the *Camshueto* moves towards the sea, the giant destroys all in its path, and upon entering a river it swallows all its fish in a few hours. But the monster prefers human flesh. Along the Pacific coast, mysterious shipwrecks *close to the shore*, were blamed upon the *Camahueto*, who had sent innumerable ships to the ocean floor. Not a single person had ever been rescued, because the monster gorged itself upon entire crews. [**43**]

WITCHES AND WATER-MONSTERS

The image of *seclusion* is a constant theme of Chilean folklore. The vanished men – whether prisoners of a 'Lost City', or enclosed forever (unlike Jonah) in a monster's belly – are closely related to the strange hermits incarcerated in the bowels of the earth. They are human beings kidnapped by witches and confined underground to guard the caverns in the company of monsters.

During a prosecution of an alleged coven of witches at San Bartolomé de Chillan, in 1743, Amerindian women testified that they met under the vault of a huge grotto, where people were dancing and drinking *chicha* (a local fermented alcoholic beverage) from an inexhaustible jar. The cave was guarded by underground monsters; each witch, before entering, had to kiss the tail of one of these creatures, the *Chivato* [**44**] A huge lizard or great snake was also present, and clambered over the bodies of the congregation. [**45**]

This sabbath of the Chilean witches is a synchretic world; the fabulous beings – the *Chivato* and the subterranean lizard or snake – belong to Araucanian beliefs [**46**], but they are inserted into the scenery of a European witches' revel, complete with the typical ritual of the obscene kiss. Amerindian concepts and ceremonies of the underground initiation of the *Machis* have mingled with the Spanish tradition of a secret school for the Black Arts, and been localized in a cavern under the city of Salamanca. [**47**]

In modern times, the inhabitants of Chiloé speak of numerous witch caverns, called locally "the caves of Salamanca", in which the souls of deceased witches find a haven

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40 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, p33.

41 ■ *ibidem*.

42 ■ *ibidem* p32.

43 ■ *ibidem* p33.

44 ■ *Chivato* (a young goat), a child kidnapped by witches and transformed into a beast-man.

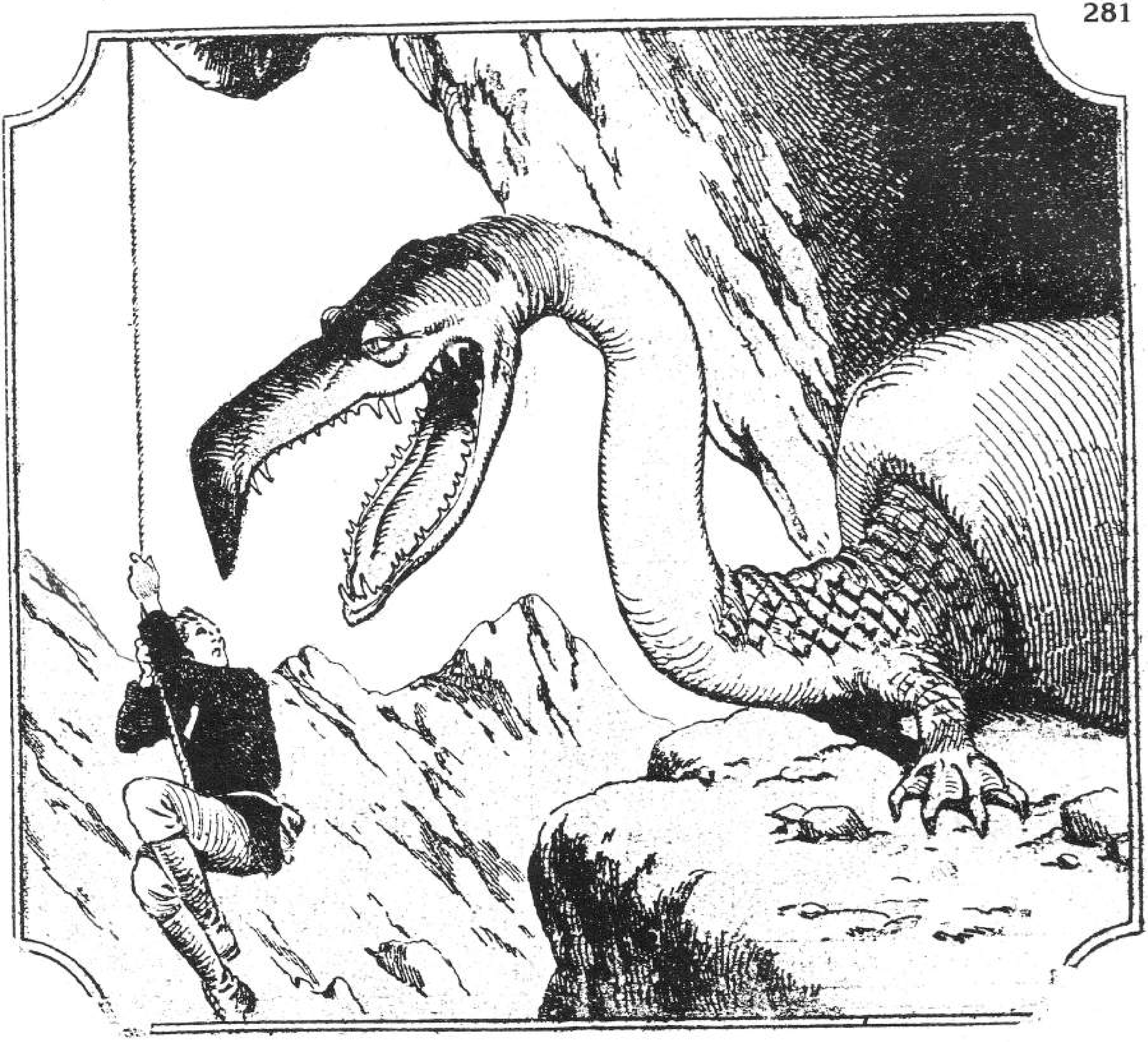
45 ■ P. Lautaro-Ferrer 1904, vol 1, pp26-27.

46 ■ The subterranean lizard of Chillan corresponds closely to the *"Lampalagua"*, a "formidable reptile armed with claws", which burrows underground and only surfaces to snatch men and kill cows. (J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915)

Alleged sightings of a *"plesiosaur"* in Patagonia, in 1922 (see R. Mackal 1980, p170), produced an international interest in Amerindian fabulous beings. A short story called 'The Lampalagua' by "Nube" (in *l'Intrepide* 15 July 1928), transforms the Araucanian myth into a living dinosaur, an "Atlantosaurus", dwelling in glacial caves on the banks of 'Inca Lake', in the Cordilleras [see illustration].

In the story, an explorer sleeps on what he thinks is a "gigantic *tree trunk*, 15 metres long", using its "cracked bark" for a pillow. He awakes in fear: *"the log was walking"*. It was the Lampalagua, with a "cayman's head, beak, slender neck, protective shell and webbed feet." Wounded in the fight, the "sea-serpent" of the Andes plunges into the depths of 'Inca Lake'.

47 ■ See M. Menéndez-Pelayo 1959, pp596-600.



The *Lampalagua;* from a French juvenile adventure magazine, *l'Intrépide* (15 July 1928). See Note 46 on this page. [Fortean Picture Library]

haven, and living witches organize their revels. Geologically, they are only the corridors of a formidable labyrinth which honeycombs the whole province. The caverns are said to be guarded by beast-men: the *Chivato* and his acolyte the *Invunche.* [48] These two monsters were once children, before they were kidnapped and transformed by the witches' evil surgery. The most famous of the caverns on Chiloé, the *cave of Quicavi,* is supposed to house the court of the King of the Witches, the dreaded "Rey de la Cueva". [49]

In 1880, a mass process of accused magicians was organized at Ancud, the chief town on Chiloé. One old defendant, Mateo Conuecar, told the judges how he had visited, more than once, the royal cave of Quicavi. It could be reached, he said, through an underground passage which began in the house of José Merriman, the present king of the sect. The door to this crypt was camouflaged with turf. In the cave of Quicavi, Mateo saw "two disfigured beings", of about 50 years of age: the *Chivato* and the *Invunche.* The *Chivato* was more like an animal than a human being, and crawled. The *Invunche* "was a naked man, with white hair and a beard which reached his waist." Conuecar added that they had been kept in seclusion in the cavern since childhood, and fed with the flesh of young

48 ■ *Invunche* = "midget, or dwarf", from "*ivun*" (little being) and "*che*" (man).

49 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, p29.

goats and the limbs of children. When they died, the secret council of the witches had them replaced. He also believed that these captive recluses (*"Encerrados"*) ultimately metamorphosed into devils. [**50**]

The *Chivato* and the *Invunche* belong to a specific class of vanished people. These Kaspar Hausers of the Chilean underworld were not the prey of sea-monsters; they had *become* monsters themselves, shaggy creatures, unrecognizeable even to their close relatives. However, their caves are related to the mysteries of the waters. Quicavi is a port, and the infamous cavern *extends under the sea.* Moreover, a native tale, published by Jacques Soustelle, describes a *Trelquehuecuve* as the *servant* of an *Invunche* who lives in a cave. The entrance to the cave is a passage which begins under a log in a lake. Pretty girls coming to fill their jars at the lake are captured by the "Hide" and brought to the *Invunche* who marries them and sucks their blood. The *Invunche*'s dwelling is also said to be found, sometimes, on the back of the circular body of the "Hide", rather like a shelter on a raft. Soustelle compares the tale with a sea journey on a cow's hide boat in another native story. [**51**]

Obviously the *Trelquehuecuve* is occasionally considered as a floating vehicle for a witch. The *Invunche* himself is described as some sort of "hide"; his body is like an inflated balloon that the hero of the tale has to burst. Traditionally, the monster was fabricated like a windbag, all the bodily orifices of the kidnapped child were sewn up. [**52**] These creatures belong to the realm of magic. According to some informants, the *Invunche* – the underground recluse – was the same being as the sea-monster, the *Camahueto.* [**53**]

During the great trial of 1880, the old defendant Conuecar testified that "spellbinders" (*"Hechiceros"*) used bones of the *Camahueto* in their folk-medicine. [**54**] These special bones were the little *horns* which sprouted from the monster's head. Like their North American brothers, the Chilean Amerindians tried to gather the horns of their water-monsters. [**55**] In Chile, such relics were allegedly found in rivers, the abode of the *Camahueto,* and, according to Father Molina, the young sea-horse. The most famous of the monster-haunted rivers was the Rio Bravo, between Nercón and Rauco, on the island of Chiloé. Local witches would *bathe* in this river to acquire the magic power conveyed to the water by the monsters living in it. [**56**]

The two enchanted realms – the underground and the underwater – were therefore closely related in the folklore of old Chile. Eddies, passages and mountain caves constituted a secret geography, an *Araucanian mythical landscape* guarded by animated hides and human windbags. In order to travel between the various levels of such realms, witches send their magical animals, such as the *Trelquehuecuve,* and also the sea-horse, which, according to Chilean tradition, can stretch its back to accommodate twelve sorcerers, and make long sea journeys. [**57**] At Quicavi, the witch-King would leave his royal cavern on the back of a sea-horse for the journey to the *witches' boat,* the *Caleuche.* This vessel embodied the greatest fear among the fishermen of Chiloé. If the *Trelquehuecuve,* in his floating hide form, is considered as a launch for a captive

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50 ■ P. Lautaro-Ferrer 1904, vol 1, p33.

51 ■ 'The Amerindian and the Hide' (J. Soustelle & G. Soustelle 1938).

According to Molina, old Chilean boats were made from inflated seal-hide balloons.

52 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, p68.

53 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, p70.

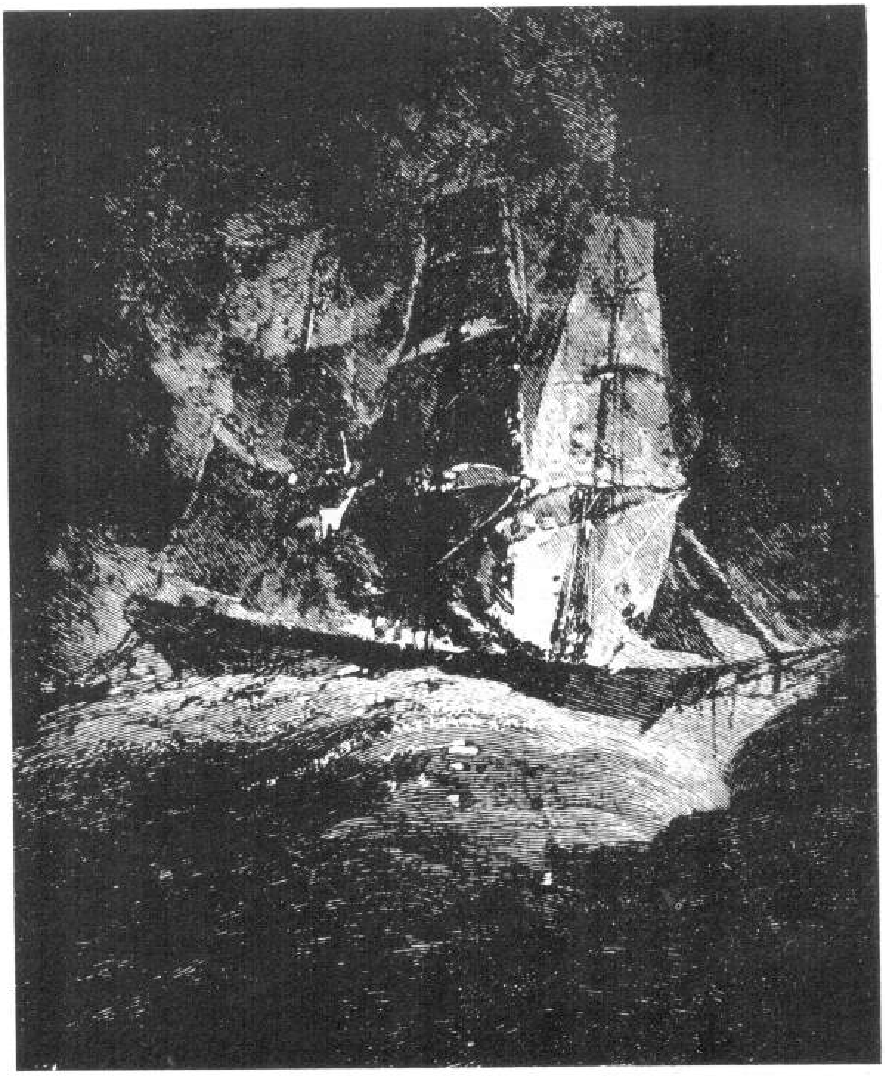
Compare the *Camahueto* in the form of a calf with a metamorphosis of the Chilean witches, going to their assembly and crossing rivers as *calves with human heads.* (*ibidem* p8.)

54 ■ P. Lautaro-Ferrer 1904.

55 ■ See Chapter 4, Section 6.

56 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, p34.

57 ■ A similar power of extension was attributed to the Celtic water-horse, allowing it to carry off whole groups of victims; see Chapter 2, Section2.



A ghostly burning ship from the maritime folklore of New England. [Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library]

maiden, the *Caleuche*, by comparison was a prison ship. It was originally conceived as a *ghost-ship*, a flaming vessel like the phantom "fire-ships" of New Brunswick. **[58]**

A traditional poem from Chiloé, calls the *Caleuche* "The Burning Frigate" ("*La Frigata incendiata*") **[59]** After the disappearance of the *Silverhorn* – a four-masted ship *en route* to Valparaiso in 1907 – a flaming ship was observed off Juan Fernandez Island. Some asserted that it was the *Caleuche* itself, endowed with the magic power to take the shape of any lost ship. **[60]** But by this time, the *Caleuche* was already conceived as a *submersible*, cruising not only the sea but the rivers as well. **[61]** As in the case of the *Camahueto*, Chilean folklore seems to have had a tendency to regard the watery realm as a unity; both fresh and salt water were populated by the same sort of creatures and devices.

In 1882, a traveller remarked that Chiloé's fishermen, in general, never learned to swim, and accordingly many shipwrecks ended tragically: "They think that *all the drowned* are taken on board a fantastic vessel they call the '*Caleuche*', a sort of *Nautilus* with a crew of witches. It travels underwater and appears at the right moment to pick up the shipwrecked, who must remain within it forever." **[62]** Shipwrecks close to the shore were also the speciality of the *Caleuche*, and the fishermen of Chiloé lived in dread of being taken. **[63]**

58 ■ See C. Jolicoeur 1970.

59 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, pp30-31.

60 ■ R. de la Croix 1978, pp129-130. Such tales of ghostly ships off the Chile coast are still in circulation. The *Weekly World News* (1st March 1988) carries the alleged story of Rafael Vargas, lone survivor of a salvage vessel, *Anita Lee*. Before he died in a Puntas Arenas hospital, Vargas is alleged to have described a huge black four-masted ship with shimmering sails that came out of the mist; so close that the crew of the *Anita Lee* saw the nameplate *Witchcraft*, and that there was no sign of any sailors on her. "All of a sudden," Vargas continues, "the ship vanished. In an instant the wind began to scream and the seas became like mountains. There was a thundering roar and a wall of water 100 feet high crashed down on us and our ship was smashed to bits." Although there is little in the report to enable verification, it nevertheless follows a typical formula of the *Caleuche* as a death omen.

61 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, p28.

62 ■ P. Lautaro-Ferrer 1904, vol 1, p29.

63 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, pp26f.

On an archaic level, the *Caleuche* was responsible for *all losses at sea.* From this supernatural form, there was a transition to a more mundane level. Indeed, according to some versions of the legend, the *Caleuche* is used by witches as a *smugglers' submersible*, surfacing in secret coves by night to unload their contraband goods. Others hold that it is a *pirate submarine*, boarding ships and abducting their crews. The unfortunate sailors, when discharged, were found to be mad amnesiacs. [**64**] Bruce Chatwin adds that among the kidnapped, all men below the rank of captain are marooned on an isolated reef. They are sometimes found wandering on beaches, singing the tunes they have heard aboard the *Caleuche*. [**65**] Amnesia and madness have replaced death. In 1897, during the great airship panics of the United States, the aerial kidnappers were credited with being hypnotists who could erase critical memories from their victims' minds. [**66**]

The more fortunate victims of the *Caleuche* are treated more like Jules Verne's heroes abducted by Captain Nemo They are taken, by the sorcerers' submarine, on abyssal journeys through the wonders of the deep, visiting underwater cities where fabulous treasures are shown to them. If they can hold their tongues, they are promised a share of the wealth. The status of the *Caleuche* has changed from the local equivalent of Charon's ferry, into a technological marvel, a prototype in the hands of a local gang. The supernatural crew has also evolved towards the secularized status of smugglers or corsairs. *The Otherworldly has metamorphosed into the Outlawed.*

Elements of local history may have helped this transition. During the 17th century, Chiloé was raided by both Dutch and English pirates; some of them were later included in the insular lore, such as Anthony, nicknamed "Black Anthony", ("Antonio el Negro"). [**67**] On this modern level of interpretation, it becomes possible for the victims to bargain with the submarine's company, who buy their silence instead of having to guard them forever in some mechanical Hell. As a consequence, suspicion fell on anyone enjoying a rapid and mysterious wealth, interpreted as proof of a pact with the *Caleuche*. [**68**]

If we return to the origin of the legend, the name of the witches' boat is worth investigating. According to Rodolfo Lenz, the word *"Caleuche"* should derive from the obsolete Araucanian verb *"caleutun"*, meaning "to change", and *"che"* meaning "people"; the *Caleuche*, therefore being the "transformed people". [**69**] Legend says that when the weird vessel suffers engine trouble, the witches choose a secluded cove for their night-time repairs. If they happen to be disturbed, the crew changes transform themselves into *sea-wolves*, and the *Caleuche* itself becomes *a log*. [**70**]

From the lake-horse of Araucania, with its seal-like limbs, to the crew of the *Caleuche* transformed into sea-wolves, pinnipeds have played a significant role in the fabulous world of Chile. One tradition even adds that the wife of the captain of the *Caleuche* is a *sea-wolf*. [**71**] On Chiloé, the water-steed of the magicians, the sea-horse, was locally believed to be a sea-elephant, or the *sea-lion*. [**72**] Father Molina also describes the sea-lion at length, stating that it can reach thirteen or fourteen

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64 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, p26f.

65 ■ B. Chatwin 1979 [1977], p158.
Compare this with the fate of the unlucky *visitors to the Caves of Quicavi*, who suffer temporary amnesia and a paralysis of the hands so that they cannot communicate what they have seen (Chatwin 1979 [1977], p156.)

66 ■ Michel Meurger, 'Zur Diskussion des Begriffs 'Modern Legend', am Beispiel du 'Airship' von 1896-1897', in *Fabula* 1985, p265.

67 ■ A. Weber 1903, p27.

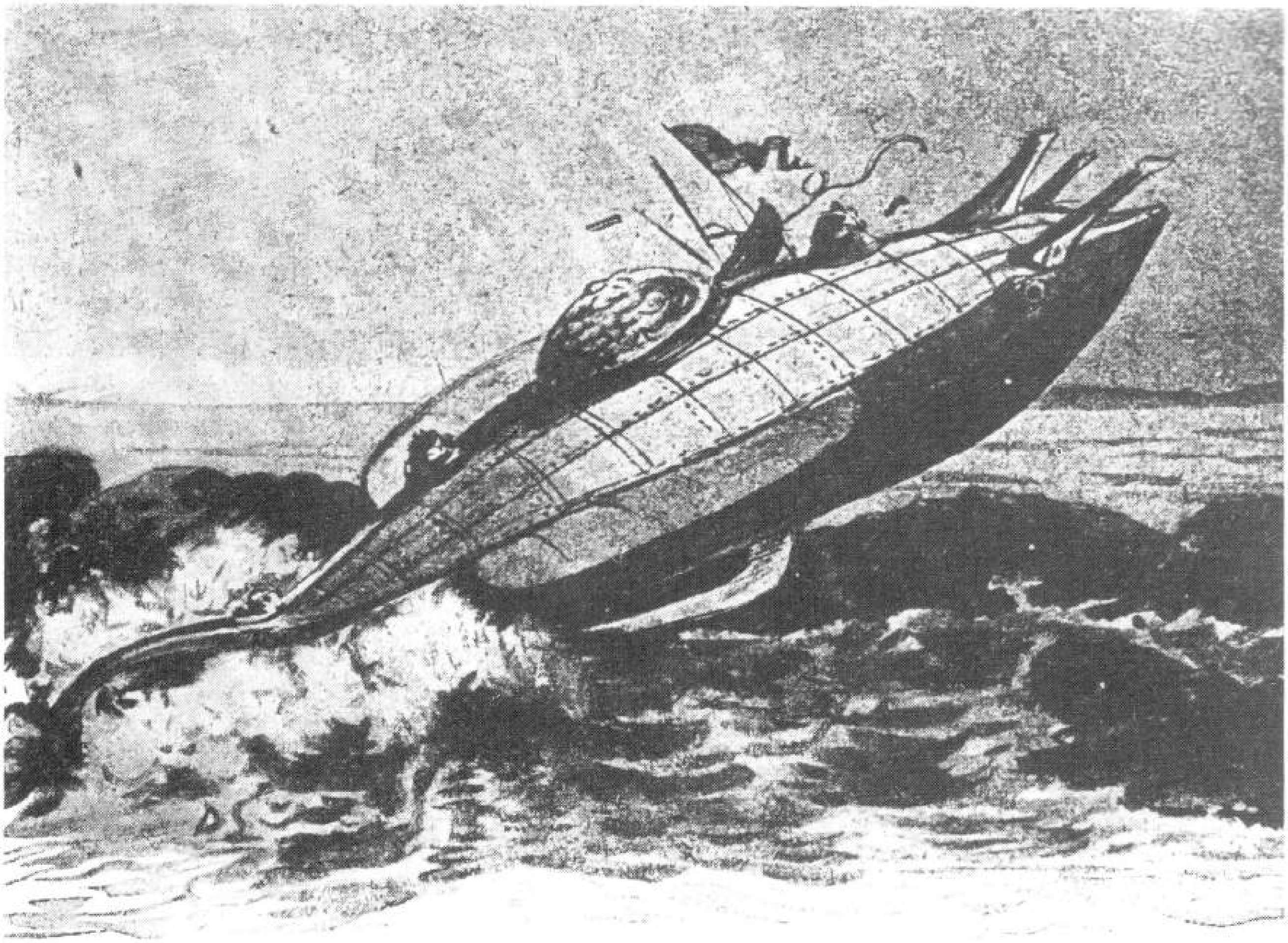
68 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, pp27-28.

69 ■ R. Lenz 1904, p163.

70 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, p28.

71 ■ *ibidem* p27.

72 ■ *ibidem* p29.
Father Guevara states also that on the coast of Paraguay: "One finds sea-horses too." (Guevara 1836, p57.)
In a Brazilian tributary of the Amazon, the Haycurupa, an island is indicated as being the abode of the "sea-horse", and scattered bones, scales and feathers are interpreted as proofs of the reality of the creature. (F. Santa-Anna-Nery 1889, p69.)
The belief in a South American river-horse is, to the best of my knowledge, attested for Argentina (the *"Piranu"*, see Chapter 4, p230), Brazil and Chile.



Japanese Prince Sizikah's monster-submarine springs out of the waves like a flying fish, combinging the overlapping modern themes of UFOs and USOs.

Drawing by Marin Baldo for Paul de Sémant's novel, *Gaëtan Faradel* **(1907).** [Fortean Picture Library]

feet and insisting on its "very perceptible mane". [**73**] This latter may be considered as one of the main reasons that leads people to view this pinniped as the embodiment of the sea-stallion.

During the first years of the twentieth century, stories about the shape-shifting crew of the *Caleuche* were counter-balanced by a rationalized interpretation of the submersible. Verne's *Twenty thousand leagues under the sea* had accustomed our grandfathers to representations of mystery submerines, profusely surrounded by electric light. A disciple of Verne, Paul de Sémant, describes at length the extraordinary submersible of a Japanese colleague of Captain Nemo, surfacing dramatically, "radiating fire" from its glass dome [see illustration]. The passengers of an ocean liner perceive this searching light as the "fiery eye of some cyclopean beast" [**74**] One of the characteristics of the *Caleuche* was, precisely, its display of abundant illumination, whether on the surface or underwater. [**75**]

In 1909, two years after the publication of De Sémant's book, an article on the *Caleuche* appeared in the Chilean *Revista Católica*. Its author, Arturo Fontecilla, produced the testimony of Don Augustin Prat, first mate on a coastguard launch called *Huemul*; Prat claimed to have seen "two huge lights travelling one metre below the surface, with a speed varying between seven and fifteen miles per hour." [**76**] Legend had once more come to life, but it is the secluded life of a hostage to Scientism. From magic and protean belief, the *Caleuche* had been reduced to phenomenology, a media-fact which can be manipulated

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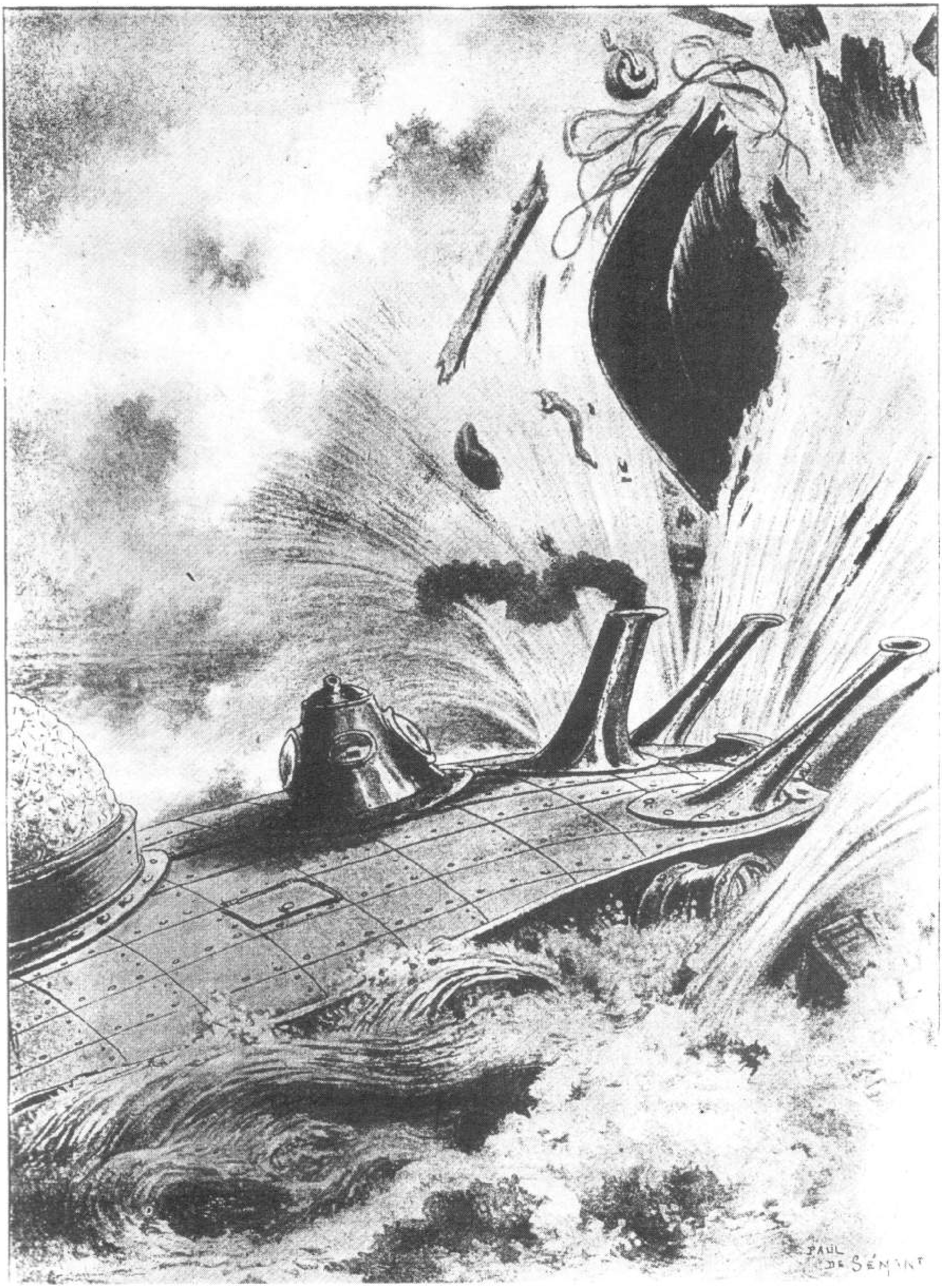
73 ■ J.I. Molina 1809, p236.

74 ■ P. de Sémant 1907, p76.

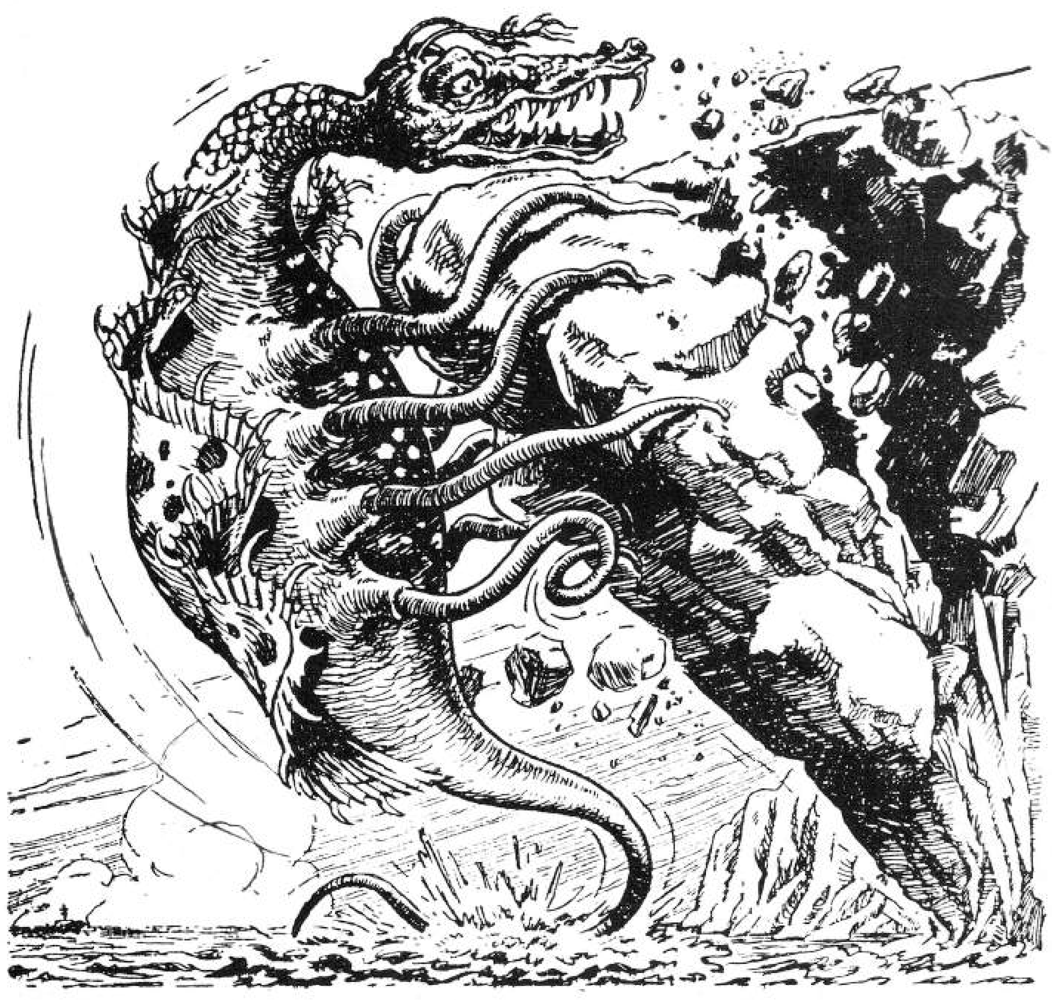
75 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, p26.

76 ■ Cited in J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, p30.



The mysterious monster-submarine of the Japanese Prince Sizikah – the *Santa Lucia* – rams a conventional ship.

Drawing by Marin Baldo for Paul de Sémant's novel, *Gaëtan Faradel* **(1907).** [Fortean Picture Library]



The "sea-dragon" of Deception Island; from *The Hotspur*, 1st October 1949. [Fortean Picture Library]

according to favourite conjectures. Sceptics can downgrade it to the status of a "marine phosphorescence", or an "enormous cluster of *Noctiluca milisares*". [77] Enthusiasts may present other cases of luminous phenomena, interpreted as sea-monsters to give the problem an anomalous issue. [78]

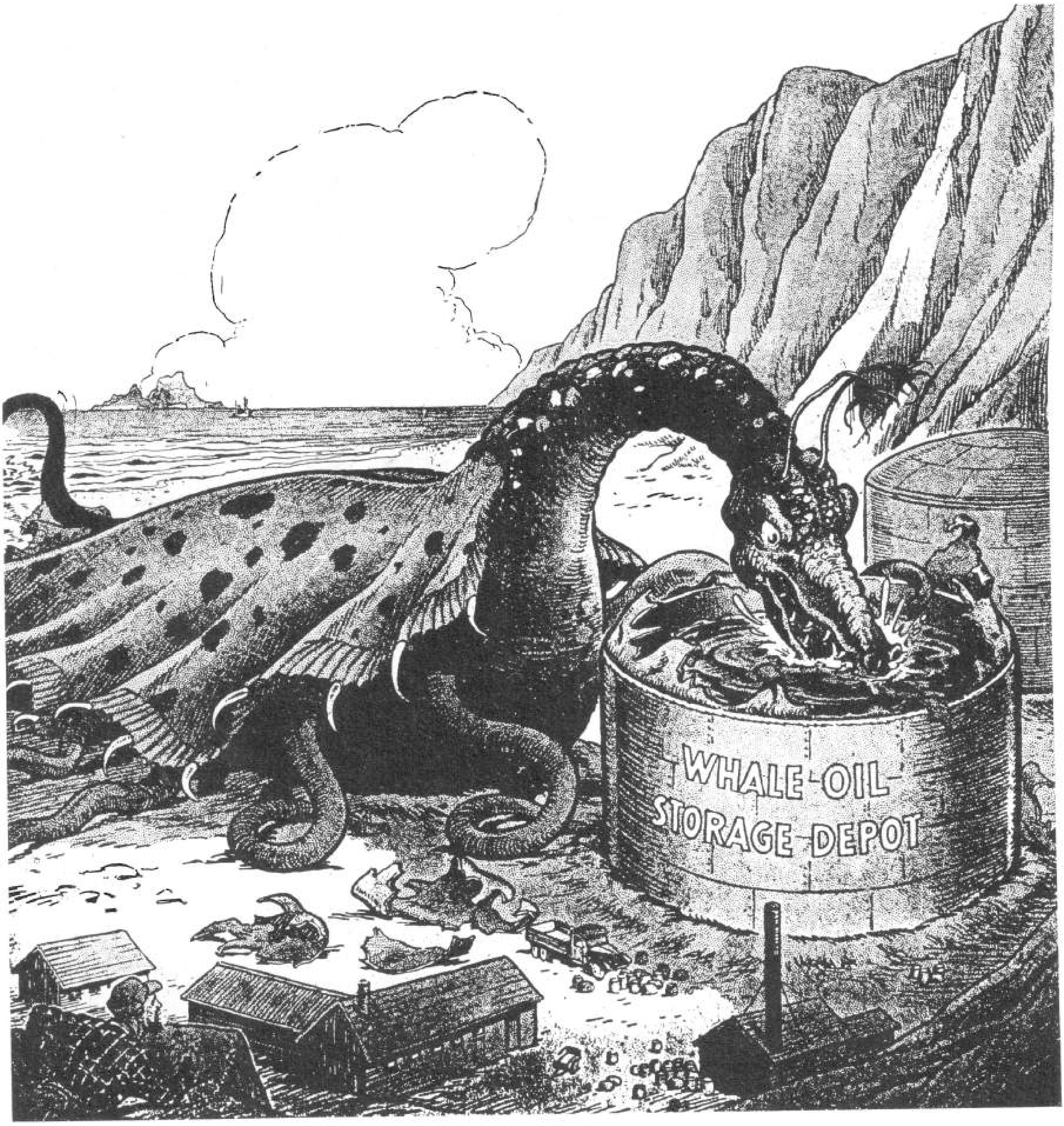
In any case, the *Caleuche* has survived its transition from being an oral tradition of fishermen's supernaturalism to being an "unidentified natural phenomena" in the dusty pages of old scientific journals, and a "manifestation of the Atlantean underwater technology" in the Occultist literature. It is a superb theme for science-fiction.

Fragments of the *Caleuche* epic may have been picked up by the French writer José Moselli (1882–1941). In his youth, Moselli served as an apprentice on a regular mail boat between France and South America. It is possible that he heard stories of the mysterious submarine when he jumped ship for a short while, somewhere "in Chile or Peru". [79] In 1929, Moselli published a remarkable serial called *War in the oceans*, in which a Russian scientist, Feodor Ivanovich Sarraskine, after an extensive study of the "biological affinities between Man and the sea-mammals", enables some of his followers to adapt physically to an underwater environment. With a troop of these "Blue Men", and a new kind of submarine, Sarraskine terrorizes the Magellan Strait from his underwater lair below Diego Ramirez

77 ■ J. Vicuña-Cifuentes 1915, p28.

78 ■ See, for example, the "*Tompondrano*" of Madagascar, described as a sea-monster covered with dermic plates like a crocodile, and with a luminous head. Intermittent glimmers observed on the surface by a fisherman and his paddlers, in 1926, were interpreted as the *Tompondrano*. (R. Decary 1950, pp204-205.)

79 ■ J. van Herp 1984, p23.
José Moselli's serial was published in *Science et Voyages* magazine between 13 December 1928 and 12 September 1929, and reprinted in a modern edition recently. (Moselli 1975.)



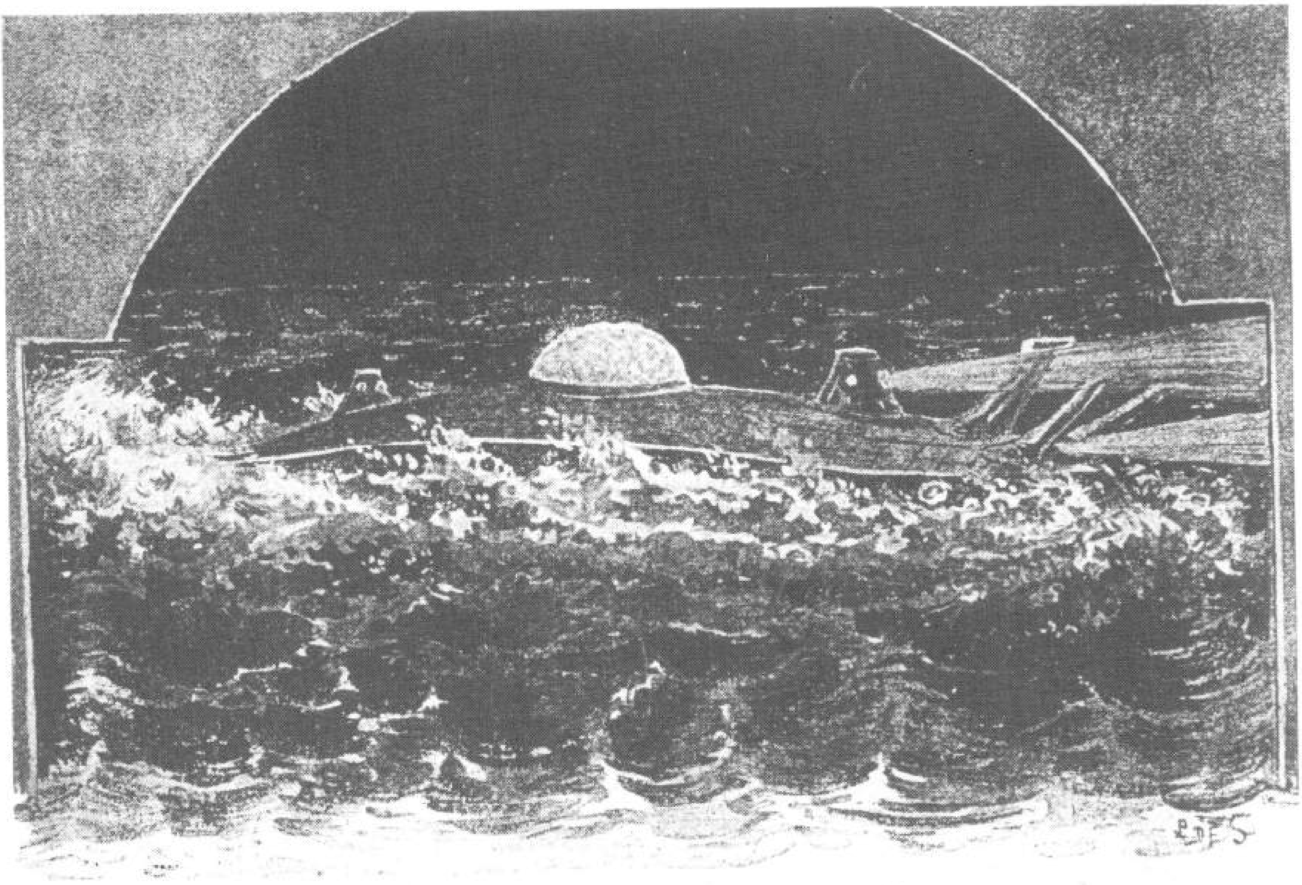
The cover illustration of *The Hotspur* (1st October 1949), depicting the "sea-dragon" which drank 100,000 gallons of whale-oil, chased Chilean cruisers and destroyed a whaling depot on Deception Island. [Fortean Picture Library]

Island, near Cape Horn. Moselli has partly followed Verne; his Sarraskine looks like a malevolent Captain Nemo, but the location of the plot, the weird submarines and the men transformed into brothers of the seals, recall, more, elements of the *Caleuche* saga, scientificized and novelized. Its witches have become villains and its magic, biology.

More recently, the startling cover of a British boys' magazine illustrated a "sea-dragon" with "two giant flaps or fins", covered with claw-like spikes and with eight tentacle-like "legs", and sporting a crocodilian head on a long neck [see illustrations]. This incredible creature – looking very much like a cross between the legendary "Hide" and a sea-serpent, with a hundred-foot tail that "lashes the water constantly" – lived off Deception Island, in the south Atlantic, according to the

80 ■ 'The monster from the deep', in *The Hotspur*, N° 673, 1st October 1949.

81 ■ Lake monsters are gradually replaced by USOs. Their model is Jules Verne's *Terrible*, the flying and rolling submersible, which, hidden in "Lake



The mysterious submarine of the Japanese Prince Sizikah, travelling on the surface of the ocean, with a lighted dome and powerful searchlights.

Drawing by Marin Baldo for Paul de Sémant's novel, *Gaëtan Faradel* **(1907).** [Fortean Picture Library]

anonymous author. It had given up chasing schools of whales to pursue instead a Chilean cruiser and some land-based whalers. [**80**]

But such extravagant monsters are no longer in vogue. Rumours of water-monsters are becoming scarce everywhere, even in Chile. It must be difficult to dream of the sea-horse in a world in which animal life itself is threatened and diminished at accelerating speed. Lake monster traditions, and those of their cousins in rivers and seas, are dwindling. They are being replaced by man-made devices, expressing the artificial surroundings of modern man. Conning towers are taking the place of the long-necks in fresh as well as salt waters. [**81**] If the *Caleuche* were to reappear, its crew would not be witches, but the grandsons of Sarraskine, the ubiquitous "Russians" of modern folklore.

APPENDIX 7

LAKE PEND OREILLE AND THE MYTHICAL LANDSCAPE

James McLeod has recently published the results of a field investigation, made by the Cryptozoology Club of the North Idaho College, of the alleged monster of Idaho's Lake Pend Oreille. [**1**] This report is a good example of cryptozoological literature at its best; sincere involvement and good erudition mixed with the usual naturalistic naivety. McLeod does not seem unduly concerned by the fact that the story of

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[**Notes continued from previous page.**] Kirdall" in Nebraska, can produce the "waves without wind" familiar to monster-haunted lakes, features in Verne's *The master of the world* (1904).

Scandinavia is particularly concerned by such transfers. The Norwegian Lake Mjösa, with its portentious serpent – see Introduction – has also been the location of an alleged sighting of a cigar-shaped object with "fluttering wings", which fell into its waters on 20 July 1946 (see Björn Overbye, 'Ghost bombs over Sweden', in *Flying Saucer Review*, vol 15, N° 2, 1969, p18.

Two Swedish monster lakes –Bullaren and Bohuslan (see J. Bord & C. Bord 1980, p222), and Lake Storsjön, the Swedish 'Loch Ness' – are also the locations of 'mystery sub' claimed sightings (see *INFO Journal* , vol 4, N° 1, May 1974, p30.)

1 ■ J.R. McLeod, *Mysterious Lake Pend Oreille and its 'monster'* (1987).

the Pend Oreille creature clearly begins in 1944 with a journalistic fraud, complete with a hoaxed photograph of a horned toad presented as the Idaho cousin of Nessie.

For our part, we estimate quite differently that the first cultural stratum of the Pend Oreille monster legend took shape as a prize piece of Paul Bunyanism not unlike the affair of the 'Aprilosaur' photograph at Lake Saint–François. [**2**] As the Pend Oreille area was a training ground for sailors during WW2 it is also not very surprising that the first alleged sighters of the lake beast in 1949 called the creature a "sea-serpent". The third layer belongs to the lore of the local fishermen, which in the 1970s, likens the monster to a big fish so familiar to the anglers of the Saint–François. [**3**]

During their investigation, the members of the Club discovered many rumours including stories of underground connexions between Lake Pend Oreille and a hidden lake, channels allowing (as in the similar fable of the Saint–François and Lake Aylmer [**4**]) a drowned corpse to circulate between the two bodies of water, claims about an underground river paralleling the ones about the Saint–François River, and gossip about a giant whirlpool not unlike the eddy of the Aylmer. They also refer to a belief about the Pend Oreille being bottomless, attested since 1910. If we add to all that rumours about terrified scuba–divers, we will recognize the cluster of legends I first studied in the first edition of this book and called the 'mythical landscape'.

Even if he sees clearly that such stories also appear at other lakes, McLeod nevertheless considers that they cannot be entirely dismissed. He even illustrates his own caution by quoting a review of the original French–Canadian edition of my book from the Journal of the International Society of Cryptozoology. [**5**] In it, the reviewer – without doubt half–blind through not having read my introductory statement about the *cultural* approach to Québecian lake monsters – reproached me for spending too much time discussing bottomless lakes and swirling currents. As anyone knows, only monsters count in the tiny world of anomalous zoology! Being one of those unfortunates who read the criticism of books and not the books themselves, McLeod quotes not my essay, where the mythical landscape is presented as clearly legendary – that is to say, fictitious – but the garbled review, which makes me out to be a quasi-believer in bottomless lakes and freshwater maelströms. Coming from the scientist's top hat, from which Congolese 'dinosaurs' appear more frequently than white rabbits, this conjuring trick is difficult to swallow.

THE 'MONSTER' IS A "LEGEND CLUSTER"
OR ASSEMBLAGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL
FEATURES [REAL OR IMAGINED]

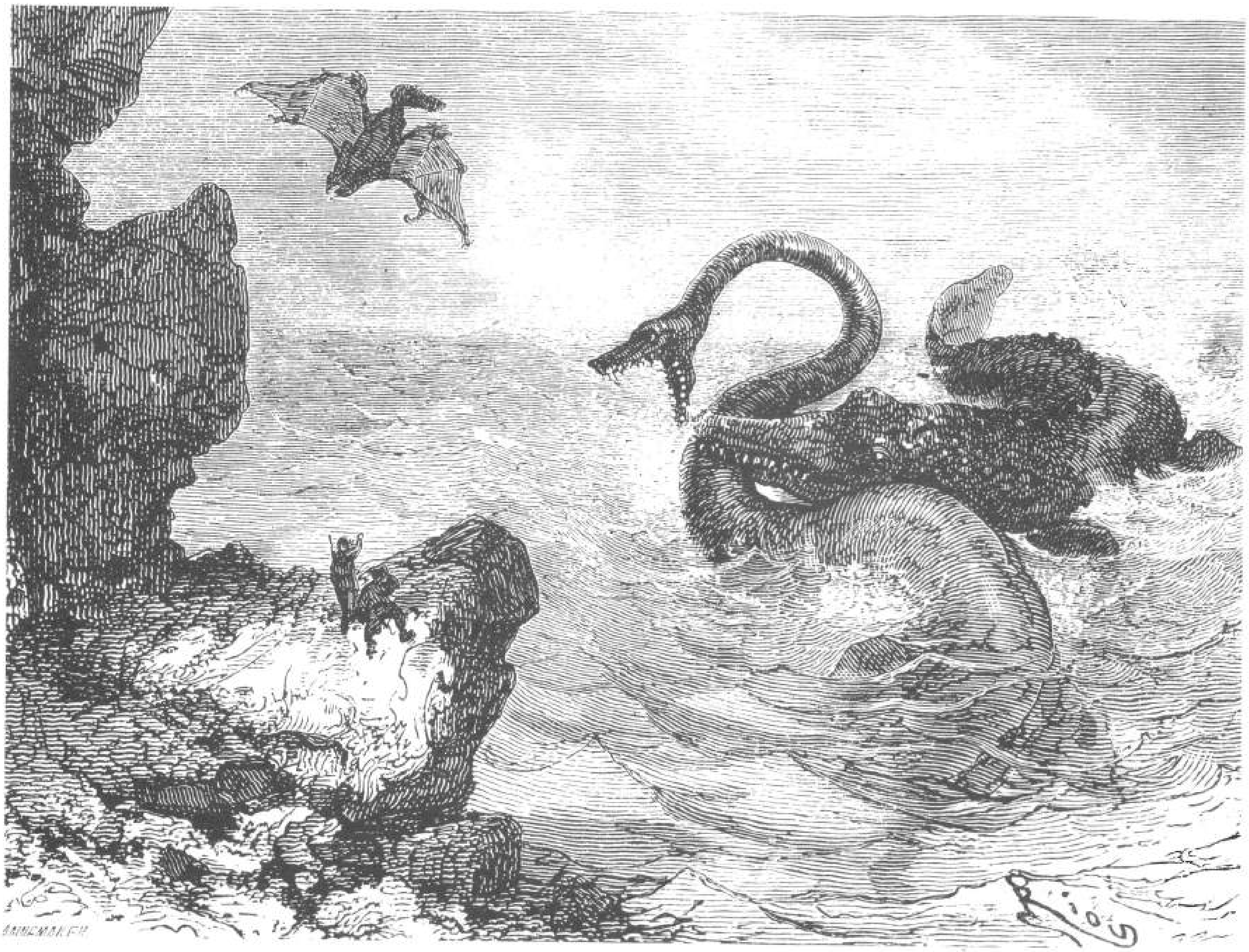
To prevent similar *legerdemain* I shall state unequivocally that, contrary to McLeod, I don't consider that a physical investigation of the mythical landscape is worthy of interest, because this bundle of beliefs, like the monster image, existed prior to any localization. Maybe there is, at Lake Pend Oreille, a strong underwater current helping the legend of the whirlpool to find a level of materiality. Maybe not. Maybe there is, in the Pend Oreille lake, as elsewhere, the occasional big fish that strengthens the monster legend. Maybe not. But even if the current and the big fish exist, producing the *facts* my reviewer

[2] ■ See Chapter 1, p60.

[3] ■ See Chapter 1, Section 5.

[4] ■ See Chapter 1, p60.

[5] ■ Review by Gerard Leduc: in *Cryptozoology* (Journal of the International Society of Cryptozoology), vol.3 (1984), pp100–101.



The vast subterranean sea in Jules Verne's *Journey to the centre of the Earth* **(1864) is a stereotype of the secret lake, hidden in an underground cavern, complete with its own monsters suitably dressed for the modern era as paleontological animals, whose survival into the present was a function of their undiscovered habitat. Illustration by Riou** [Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library.]

was so eager to detect, they do not explain the original legends because they are weak rationalizations of them.

Cryptozoologists will always fail – in Lake Pend Oreille as in Loch Ness – because they try to explain a general myth in local terms. All they can catch are stunning waves and huge sturgeons, which solve only *why* the legends have fixed on a specific lake, but not the specific form of the legend. Such searchers after the unknown in lakes will always find the known, while the really anomalous – the snake with the horse's head – will elude them because it belongs to general myth and cultural symbolism.

When I read, in McLeod, page after page of naturalistic reports of unfathomable depths, I realize that my own study of the mythical landscape is far from being superfluous, as my reviewer suggests, but is in fact central to my attempt to discover where lake monster reports belong. Canadian monsters and their mythical landscape belong to the same age–old structure and are of European origin. By returning local traditions of whirlpools and monsters to their legendary models I have shown their illusory character on the local level.

To the contrary, cryptozoologists, concentrating on Scotland, Scandinavia and North America, own various points of fixation on this cultural constellation and are confused by the giant work of reinforcement realized by the residents. The fiction has been cemented by all the available ambiguous phenomena. Standing waves and surrealistic trunks are necessary items of decor for the stage on which discourses are transformed into facts. Therefore, the main aim of cryptozoologists – to separate fact from folklore – is condemned to failure, because, as in the case of claims about lake monsters, facts are folklorized. The tree-trunk is interpreted as a monster *because* of the prevailing beliefs.

When they propose to disentangle facts from folklore, cryptozoologists assume that such facts are anomalous ones. I suggest, to the contrary, that it is the interpretation which is anomalous. Folklore creates an illusory phenomenology. Loch Ness belongs not to 'anomalistics' [6] but to ideology. In contrast with their official disdain of culture, cryptozoologists have been the best supporters of traditional belief; directly, because, due to their advocacy of a kernel of truth in legends, they imply that legends are reports and therefore true after all; and indirectly, because they fail to take account of the common play of reinforcement between monster beliefs and the mythical landscape.

The publishing of a cryptozoological hypothesis reactivates and transforms the slumbering belief into mysterious creatures in a lake, and projects related legends into the surroundings. Old stories about underground channels and unfathomable depths return to the surface of popular consciousness, but like the monster they adapt to a more reasonable and naturalistic social context. Accordingly, from original *legends*, monsters and the mythical landscape are transformed into *speculations*. Each helps the other: the monster, being the most discussed, reinforces the mythical landscape and plays the role of an harbinger of probability; the mythical landscape, in turn, helps the belief in the monster to withstand the disillusions of the search. Legendary underground passages change into conjectural ones and help a fictitious creature to shelter from the strongest nets. Undiscovered abysses are more reasonable than bottomless places, and they are also more convenient to hide the uncatchable

Due to this 'happy medium' of Anomalistics, whole segments of the legendary world have gained access to the natural science journals and scholarly debates. Our old friend the sea–dragon has lost his Andromeda but won a seat in the Royal Museum of Scotland. [7]

APPENDIX 8

A VISIT TO THE NYKKJEN

In August 1987, when I was on the Norwegian west-coast island of Hareidland, Konrad Myrene of Haddal, a local farmer and keen collector of folklore, told me about a mountain tarn called Myrkevatn or Svartevatn (Dark or Black Lake). According to legend, Myrkevatn was dug out of the hard rock by giants, and because its waters have no known outlet, it is said they flow through a silver conduit placed on the bottom by a beautiful princess. If you stand at the right place

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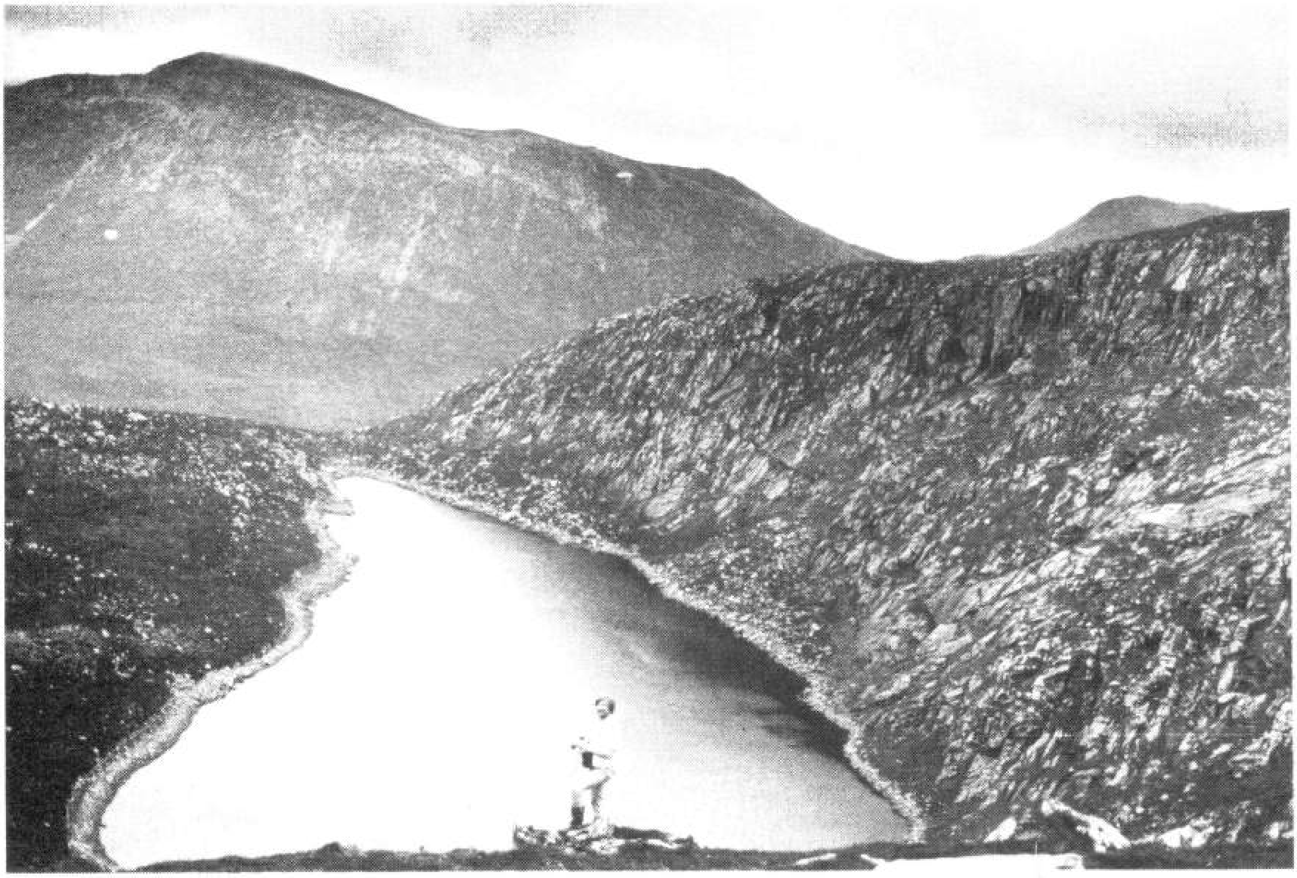
[6] For discussion of the term – defined as the interdisciplinary approach to anomalies of which the major branches are the "parasciences" and the "cryptosciences" – see: Marcello Truzzi, 'Zetetic ruminations on skepticism and anomalies in science,' *Zetetic Scholar*, N^os^ 12 & 13 (August 1987), pp7–20.

[7] Reference to the annual conference of the International Society of Cryptozoology, held, in July 1987, at the Royal Museum of Scotland, in Edinburgh.

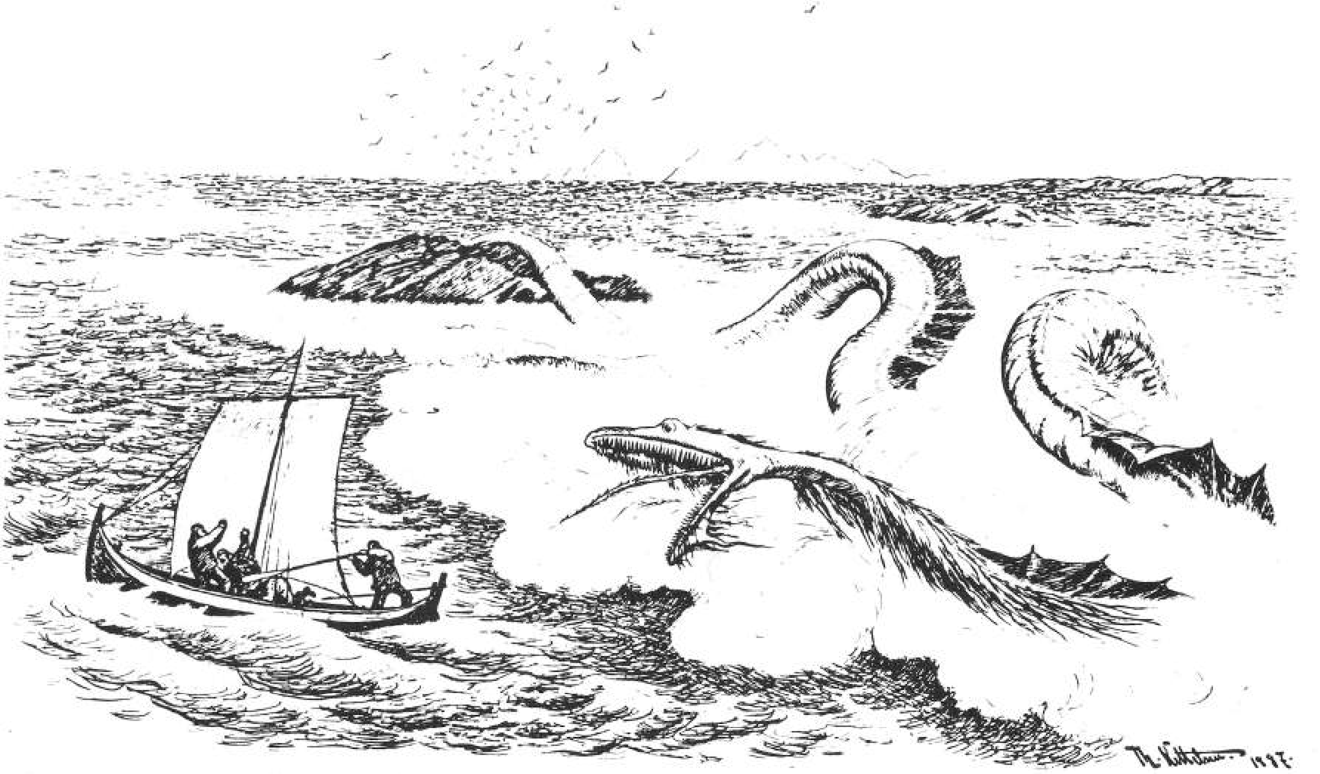


The author at the *Myrkevatn* [Dark Lake], on Hareidland Island, Norway, in August 1987.
[© Michel Meurger.]

on the slopes, peering into the depths with the sun's rays falling into the water, you might catch a glimpse of the silvery shimmer of the secret pipe. Other traditions refer to something imprisoned behind the steep slopes, a giant *lindorm*, or a whole sailing ship whose long stern one can hear sometimes banging against the subterranean wall.

There is also a story about an alleged sighting of a *Nykkjen* (or *Nøkk*, a water-man) in the Myrkevatn, in 1938, by Kari Ivarsdotter, a lady farmer. Kari had climbed the mountain, far from the path, to search for a missing sheep, when she saw something moving through the water below like an "upturned boat". Then the *Nykkjen* raised its head and shook the water off its dripping beard. Kari ran away.

Interested in this extensive legend cycle, I decided to make an excursion to the Black Lake. On August 2nd, I found the lake, at a height of 428m on the slopes of the Garnestua Mountain, at the bottom of a semi-circular valley. On one slope were curious gneiss formations, like black organ pipes. The stillness of the Myrkevatn was disturbed only by the reflections of white clouds in complete silence. It is plain that the modest dimensions of such a tiny lake forbid the possibility that it could be inhabited by a huge animal. Furthermore, the lack of life in its too-dark waters is so obvious that, according to local lore, the scarce fish population starved, gradually evolving into extremely thin specimens "with no skin on their jaw-bones". And yet the "upturned boat" form allegedly seen by Kari is in accord with the classical form of Nessie and the Québecian lake-monsters, and the beard of the *Nykkjen* is a variant of the mane of water-monsters everywhere.


Th. Kittelsen 1887.

The Norwegian sea-serpent, as drawn by Theodor Kittelsen (1857–1914) for his 1892 collection *Troldskab* (Troll-magic).

He produced this drawing during his stay in the Lofoten Islands in 1887, and his own commentary reflects the Norwegian folk-belief that the sea-serpent is a mutation of a snake, a *lindorm*. He wrote that the *Sjøorm* [sea-serpent] is "born on land". As it grows larger, it "roams the forest" and eventually discovers the sea. "Sinking to the bottom, it becomes bigger, endless."

The obvious impossibility of any unknown zoological creature living in such unfit surroundings has long been understood by the local people. Unlike cryptozoologists and other enthusiasts, they have admitted this as a fact but have interpreted it as a proof of the supernatural–dæmonic origins of such monsters. Thus, as J.F. Campbell recorded in 1862, a Highlander he was interviewing about the local 'water-bull' ended his statement with these words: "It cannot be a good thing, or in a small loch like that one it would be seen more often. It could not keep hidden." [1]

Campbell's informant had revealed a deep truth. Throughout Europe, the legend-makers had chosen precisely the unfittest place for life – the dark lakes of the mythical landscape – for the same reasons that the Amerindians chose the foaming eddies to localize their own monsters. The main purpose seems to be to conceptualize the monster as the personification of its surroundings, the barrenness of black waters, or the destructive power of the great falls.

The Myrkevatn concentrates all the elements necessary to surmise a monster in its depths: desolation, obscurity and isolation from the traditional routes of social communication. In this sense Kari met the *Nykkjen* as the result of breaking a taboo: she had literally strayed from the familiar (and therefore human) path, and her experience with the water-man could be interpreted as a symbolic warning of the dangers awaiting those who trespass on the wild and unknown side of nature. She interprets some banal object as a traditional monster, because, being conscious of having broken an archaic code, she is in expectation of retribution. The specific conditions of the sighting, as well as the imagery of the monster, are group-induced. Since her childhood Kari had learned that the *Nykkjen* looks like this, therefore her sighting is an act of social allegiance. [2]

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[1] ■ J.F Campbell, 1862, vol 4, p329.

[2] ■ Monsters are not only associated with forbidden *places*, but also with forbidden *times*.

Fishing after 8pm at Loch Ness is against local regulations. Nessie-historian Constance Whyte quotes local traditions about prohibited night-fishing ending with a frightening experience. In one instance, a fisherman's boat is heaved up by unseen forces – which is imagined to be the long neck of the water-horse rising from the deep – terrifying the night-poacher. Whyte evidently interprets such tales as possible encounters with Nessie, but they seem to be *warning legends*, intended to reinforce a social taboo. (See C. Whyte 1958, pp29-30.)

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HUNT EMERSON

The author in the field.
A portrait by Hunt Emerson.
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NOTE

Rather than impose an undesirable and artificial uniformity upon such diverse material, sources and usages, entries in all three indexes (designated A: – C:) have been elaborately cross-referenced with simplified pointers (☛ = see, or see also; ☚ = which see). Lake Monsters, River Monsters, Sea Monsters, Sea-serpents and a general term Water Monsters are abbreviated to LM, RM, SM, SS, WM respectively. Other abbreviations are from common usage. To avoid cumbersome repetition the words and 'L.' abbreviation for 'Lake' have been omitted unless clarification was necessary.. Many entries are qualified in brackets with a brief indication of place, culture or authority. Page numbers in bold refer to material in a picture or caption; those with an 'n' suffix refer to a page or an associated note.

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CLAUDE GAGNON teaches the philosophy of science at the Collège Édouard–Montpetit and at the University of Québec, Montréal.

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